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World Literature Today

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Panel: World Literature Today: Cross-currents

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World Literature Today

I don't know much about trends. I still wear eighties-style clothing. I only found out what a hashtag was about a year ago, and apparently I've been sending out this aubergine emoji incorrectly. So, by having to learn about watching trends, I have come to realize that the strongest trend in literature, music, and art is now either an attempt to understand human existence, or to run away from it.

Take the books *Eat Pray Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert and *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom. These to me are self-help books. The trend is Dr. Phil's guide to improving your relationships, and somehow people have forgotten that Douglas Adams gave us a Guide to the Galaxy long before we had an app that can tell us who is from Mars and who is from Venus.

Spilling your guts in prose seems to be the trend. Everyone is doing it. Tell-all books are trending. Finally I have found out how to Win Friends and Influence People—I actually did not know how to do this before. Apparently Rhonda Byrne has told me The Secret, and to actually have a Purpose-Driven Life is to practice Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance. And then, you can have your Conversations with God, and finally find that Gary Zukav and Deepak Chopra can argue for days about whether the Seat of the Soul is found in Quantum Healing. Apparently, you too can Heal your Life. I mean, When Bad Things Happen to Good People, you can always read a book about the Miles to Go, by Miley Cyrus.

If perchance you find yourself pushing self-help books at your local book club/wine excuse, and someone calls you Bossypants, you could always respond by being reading *Rebel*, a novel by Kendall and Kylie Jenner. And looking for the Power of Now, or even finding a New Earth (by Eckhart Tolle) has never been easier than it is now.

But Seriously...I'm Kidding (by Ellen DeGeneres).

Latest trends in literature, in my opinion, have now moved to learning the meaning of life and how to live it, or escaping reality as much as you possibly can. Oh, and by the way, the meaning of life is 42, which is exactly my age now. I guess by now I should have learned the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, and how to Think and Grow Rich using the Power of my Subconscious Mind.

Well, I've had to be the one who thinks, and my publisher grows rich. They constantly harangue me with line edits on my literary and obscure novel content, urging me non-stop to stop the colloquial language, to modify the dialect, to make my work more imminently and eminently marketable to A Global Market. Eventually I get sick of Skype fights, and relent. I listen to them, and kill my darlings. I mean, my games here are The Hunger Games, Parts One, Two and Three. I need the decoded Da Vinci Code from the flashy publisher's office in Manhattan, because my bank balance would scare away Angels and Demons, especially now that I no longer have a Lord of the Rings. And anyway, they have used focus groups and graphs to tell me what makes a book, a saleable book in today's literary market. What can I say? I follow their graphs and trends.

I came to Iowa, arriving at Twilight, New Moon. It was supposed to be ZP Dala and the Philosopher's Stone. Searching for this elusive stone, I became ZP Dala and the Prisoner of Azka-Brand. Pursued by dementors daily, I finally accepted that without any MFA or writing credentials I became ZP Dala, the Half-Blood Princess. I flirted with the idea of academia and becoming ZP Dala and the Deathly Fellows. I

clumsily tripped over, ate too much ice cream, and began to sit alone on my bed singing Celine Dion's "All by Myself" and writing Bridget Dala's Diary. At some point, the world became Fifty Shades of Yellow and Black—I threw myself out of my One Hundred Days of Solitude and started showing off my Dragon Tattoo. I tried not to think that Things ARE Falling Apart, and the saleable trend in my country is to write outdated detective murder mysteries, and then win prizes.

I cannot answer what the trends are. The only trend I know is an economic literati mafia. But believe or don't believe me: I am not an Interpreter of Maladies, nor am I even acquainted with any God, whether he likes Small Things or Big Things.

So, this is my trend, a quote from my favorite book: *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, by Hunter S. Thompson:

"Never create anything. It will be misinterpreted, it will chain you and follow you for the rest of your life. Stop humping the American Dream. Mescaline is best. And never give your real name."