

ELLE MARCH



You probably have a book you love above all others, but if you tell me to read it, I won't. It sounds harsh, and it's not because I doubt your taste (you are reading ELLE, after all). It's because the experience of loving that novel was yours. It belonged to you. I wouldn't want a passionate love affair with the same person you'd just had the best night of your life with (well, there may be exceptions), and I feel the same about books: I'd rather find my own to fall in love with.

Of course, refusing to read anything popular or from 'the canon' would be silly. It'd mean I'd never have had the pleasure of Zadie Smith or Raymond Carver, Armistead Maupin's *Tales of the City* or Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. I'd have missed out on Alice Munro and Katherine Mansfield, and not had Jeanette Winterson to counsel me through coming out as a teenager. But no one gave me these books and told me I had to read them – I discovered these writers for myself. Whether it was browsing Waterstones, my parents' shelves or the local library, something drew me to their works and when I read them I felt they were talking directly to me. Now, these books line my shelves at home, each one a brick that has helped build the person I am today.

On page 190, Ruby Tandoh explores the intensely personal relationships we feel we have with writers whose work we love. The late Nora Ephron is someone Ruby takes both comfort and inspiration from. Nora is one of my literary icons, too, and her famous saying, 'Everything is copy', really resonates. She meant that one's real life is a rich source of material for storytelling, and I agree. Often, when I'm in the middle of some ridiculous scenario, I can't help playing it out a bit longer because I'm thinking what a great anecdote it'll make. I'll exaggerate the good bits and leave out the boring parts, but the very act of telling a story fictionalises it, so embellishing or getting creative with the facts isn't exactly lying... is it?

I'm interested in the idea that we're living in a 'post-truth' world, where politicians can make wildly inaccurate statements and 'news' stories can be completely fake, but it doesn't matter as long as the delivery is passionate, or authoritative enough. I asked several new writers to unpick their own relationships with 'truth' on page 182, and their essays are a fascinating insight into secrets, lies and the tension between our public and private lives.

No one understands this tension more than our cover star Emma Watson, having been cast at the age of 11 in the film adaptation of the world's most popular novel series, *Harry Potter*. Emma has grown up inhabiting the reality of a fiction that people feel belongs to them. Today, she is part of another story as a celebrity, where a narrative about who she is can be imposed on her, whether she likes it or not. It's no wonder Emma is such a private person: her truth must be very precious. On page 202, she talks about this, and how her feminist book club, Our Shared Shelf, brings women together and generates important conversations that can lead to positive action.

If you've read *The Devil Wears Prada*, you'll know that magazine editors call their publication the 'book'. I think of each issue of ELLE in this way. It has a beginning, a middle and an end, as well as a protagonist – the cover star. There are lots of voices and tangents within it, but there's also a strong narrative to an issue that carries you through. Our fashion shoots are some of the most compelling subplots. Just turn to 'Sublime Pastoral' on page 210 to see what I mean: stunning twin girls, a wild Sicilian landscape and clothes that tell their own story. ELLE's Fashion Director Anne-Marie Curtis and photographer Kai Z Feng will have had an idea in mind when they shot it, but the beauty of their pictures is that they allow us the space to create our own meanings.

The writer (and recent Céline campaign model) Joan Didion wrote, 'We tell ourselves stories in order to live.' It's so true and evident in the photos we post to Instagram as much as the daily outfits we choose to wear. This issue of ELLE is a celebration of books, new writers and the stories we tell about ourselves and the world we live in. Enjoy it, and remember: if life's a book and you're its author, make it unputdownable.

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