# Sarah Jessica Parker redirects focus from fashion to free expression at PEN America gala



At the recent PEN America Literary Gala, a poignant red-carpet moment involving Sarah Jessica Parker and Jenna Ortega unfolded, revealing not only the complexities of celebrity culture but also the underlying themes of advocacy for literature and free expression. The 60-year-old Parker, famously known for her role as Carrie Bradshaw in "Sex and the City," was asked by an Associated Press journalist about Ortega's choice to wear a vintage Christian Dior dress reminiscent of Bradshaw’s iconic style. In a surprisingly curt exchange, Parker redirected the discussion towards the gala's primary focus: books and the celebration of free expression.

When asked about Ortega’s dress, Parker interrupted the question, saying, "Why don't you want to talk about reading and books and PEN?" This response sparked varying reactions online, with many arguing that the actress was right to maintain the event’s focus on literary issues rather than celebrity fashion. Social media users defended Parker’s stance, suggesting that the journalist failed to provide adequate context about the dress, which has become a symbol of both nostalgia and fashion evolution over the years. One user noted, “She felt the question was undermining the credibility of the event,” while another implied the journalist could have simply referred to it as the "newspaper dress," which would have resonated more readily with Parker.

The backdrop of this incident is significant. The 2025 PEN America gala, hosted by Amber Ruffin at the American Museum of Natural History, was dedicated not only to celebrating writers and literature but also to protesting against censorship and advocating for free expression, particularly in an era marked by increasing challenges to these ideals. Honorees at the event included not only Parker but also imprisoned Egyptian poet Galal El-Behairy and Macmillan CEO Jon Yaged, highlighting a diverse range of voices committed to safeguarding literary freedoms.

Parker has long been vocal about her commitment to literacy and the importance of libraries. She founded the publishing imprint SJP Lit and produced a documentary titled "The Librarians," which explores the critical role of libraries in communities. Her advocacy work resonates profoundly with the themes emphasised at the gala, making her red-carpet comments all the more relevant. As the conversation surrounding freedom of expression intensifies in light of various socio-political censorship issues, events like this offer a platform for star figures such as Parker to reinforce the significance of literature in society.

Meanwhile, Ortega, at just 22 years old, has established herself as a fashion icon, with the Dior dress she wore—a piece from John Galliano's Fall/Winter 2000 collection—having previously been donned by other celebrities like Kim Kardashian and Emily Ratajkowski. This history makes Ortega's modern reinterpretation of the dress not only a nod to the past but also an exploration of fashion’s cyclical nature. At the gala, she wore the dress with understated elegance, accessorising it with subtle gold jewellery, a nude pink manicure, and styling her hair into a long bob with soft curls.

The interplay between the two actresses—the seasoned Parker and the emerging Ortega—serves as a reminder of the enduring impact of iconic television and the fashion it birthed. While their styles and public personas feature prominently in popular culture, the deeper narrative at the PEN America Literary Gala was prioritising artistic expression and the defence of intellectual freedoms.

In a world increasingly questioning the protection of literary arts, Parker’s commitment to this cause is clear, and her reactions on the red carpet underscore the gravity of the evening's purpose, urging the spotlight to shine on literature rather than fleeting fashion moments.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.
2. Paragraphs 3, 4.
3. Paragraphs 4, 5.
4. Paragraphs 3, 4.
5. Not used.
6. Not used.
7. Not used.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-14727777/sarah-jessica-parker-debate-chat-jenna-ortega-red-carpet.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/5a436e9f068a92862e28371ebe7eba8d> - At PEN America’s annual gala in New York City, hosted by Amber Ruffin at the American Museum of Natural History, writers, publishers, and editors gathered to celebrate free expression and protest censorship. Ruffin humorously acknowledged her personal experience with censorship and criticized former President Trump. Honorees included actress and publisher Sarah Jessica Parker, who received the PEN/Audible Literary Service Award for her advocacy of books and against book bans, imprisoned Egyptian poet Galal El-Behairy, Macmillan CEO Jon Yaged, and Wesleyan University President Michael Roth. Roth emphasized the need to defend democracy. PEN also highlighted recent challenges, including controversy over its response to the Gaza conflict, which led to canceled events in 2024 and leadership changes. This year, PEN’s reinvigorated awards and World Voices festival acknowledged ongoing global concerns, with prize withdrawals and donations directed toward Palestinian causes. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/5a436e9f068a92862e28371ebe7eba8d?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://apnews.com/article/3bea74b0d4fe1e43db473a64da7f69f6> - Sarah Jessica Parker will receive the PEN America Literary Service Award on May 15 during the organization's annual spring gala. Known for her role in 'Sex and the City,' Parker is being recognized for her efforts in promoting literacy and advocating against book bans. She has founded a publishing imprint, SJP Lit, and produced an anti-book banning documentary, 'The Librarians.' Jon Yaged, CEO of Macmillan Publishers, will receive the Business Visionary Award for his leadership and commitment to publishing diverse voices. Both Parker and Yaged are celebrated for their contributions to the literary community and defense of the freedom to read. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/3bea74b0d4fe1e43db473a64da7f69f6?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://pen.org/2025gala/> - The 2025 PEN America Literary Gala is scheduled for Thursday, May 15, 2025, at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. The event will honor Sarah Jessica Parker with the PEN/Audible Literary Service Award and Jon Yaged, CEO of Macmillan Publishers, with the Business Visionary Award. The gala aims to celebrate and defend freedom of expression, with proceeds supporting PEN America's cultural programming and advocacy work. ([pen.org](https://pen.org/2025gala/?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.vogue.com/article/jenna-ortega-metal-ruler-dress-2025-met-gala> - At the 2025 Met Gala, Jenna Ortega wore a custom Balmain dress designed by Olivier Rousteing. The silver gown was crafted from hundreds of metal rulers, creating a plunging bustier and form-fitting silhouette. Ortega accessorized with silver Hearts on Fire earrings, diamond and silver rings, and silver Christian Louboutin pumps. Her hair was styled in undulating pin curls, complemented by cool-toned eyeshadow and a plum-lined lip. ([vogue.com](https://www.vogue.com/article/jenna-ortega-metal-ruler-dress-2025-met-gala?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/celebrity/latest/a64671738/jenna-ortega-red-carpet-photos-met-gala-2025/> - Jenna Ortega attended the 2025 Met Gala in a strapless metallic silver dress by Balmain's Olivier Rousteing. The dress appeared to be made from numbered rulers sculpted to her body. Ortega coordinated the look with a silver collar necklace, an array of sparkly rings, and bouncy Old Hollywood curls. ([harpersbazaar.com](https://www.harpersbazaar.com/celebrity/latest/a64671738/jenna-ortega-red-carpet-photos-met-gala-2025/?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.elle.com/fashion/celebrity-style/a64688301/jenna-ortega-photos-met-gala-2025/> - Jenna Ortega arrived at the 2025 Met Gala in a shining metal dress custom-designed by Balmain. The sleek sheath dress was crafted entirely from metallic rulers, placed vertically along the body to enhance the silhouette and create a bustier gown sculpted on her body. Ortega completed the look with a smoky eye, understated silver jewelry, and a perfectly crisp French manicure. ([elle.com](https://www.elle.com/fashion/celebrity-style/a64688301/jenna-ortega-photos-met-gala-2025/?utm_source=openai))