

Burn This Book: PEN Writers Speak Out on the Power of the Word

By Toni Morrison

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"A writer's life and work are not a gift to mankind; they are its necessity"

- Toni Morrison, Burn this Book

Published in conjunction with the PEN American center, Burn this Book is a powerful collection of essays that explore the meaning of censorship, and the power of literature to inform the way we see the world, and ourselves. Contributors include literary heavyweights like Toni Morrison, Salman Rushdie, Orhan Pamuk, David Grossman and Nadine Gordimer, and others.

In "Witness: The Inward Testimony" Nadine Gordimer discusses the role of the writer as observer, and as someone who sees "what is really taking place." She looks to Proust, Oe, Flaubert, Graham Green to see how their philosophy squares with her own, ultimately concluding "Literature has been and remains a means of people rediscovering themselves." "In Freedom to Write" Orham Pamuk elegantly describes escorting Arthur Miller and Harold Pinter around Turkey and how that experience changed his life.

In "The Value of the Word" Salman Rushdie shares a story from Bugakov's novel The Master and the Margarita in which the Devil talks to a frustrated writer called "The Master" The writer is so upset with his own work he decides to burn it: "How could you do that?" the devil asks... "Manuscripts to not burn." Indeed, manuscripts do not burn, Rushdie argues, but writers do.

As Americans we often take our freedom of speech for granted. When we talk about censorship we talk about China, the former Soviet Union. But the recent presidential election has shined a spotlight on profound acts of censorship in our own backyard. Both provocative and timely, Burn this Book include a sterling list of award winning writers; it sure to ignite spirited dialogue.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
In 11 short essays by some of the world's premier novelists, this volume explores a simple question: why write? Contributor Paul Auster may put the query best: "Surely it is an odd way to spend your life-sitting alone in a room with a pen in your hand, hour after hour, day after day, year after year, struggling to put words on pieces of paper." In response, Pico Iyer delivers a moving account of a Burmese trishaw driver living under political oppression, who for years composed (by candlelight) letters to the author, many of which were censored. Orhan Pamuk also explores this intense human hunger for stories and creative freedom with an anecdote from his March 1985 tour of Turkey, on which he introduced Arthur Miller and Harold Pinter to Turkish writers who had suffered "repression, cruelty and outright evil" in a military coup. Francine Prose, on the other hand, makes a lively attempt to separate literature from politics (in which she cops to her own political biases in her choice of examples). The disparate voices produce a complex of reasons that drive writers, though all agree that, as observed by Morrison (wearing both editor and contributor caps), it's a "bleak, unlivable, insufferable existence... when we are deprived of artwork."
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About the Author

Toni Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. She is the author of many novels, including *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved*, and, most recently, *A Mercy*. She has also received the National Book Critics Circle Award and a Pulitzer Prize for her fiction.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Paul Tirrell:

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Jack Johnson:

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