

BOOK CLUB KIT



The **COLLECTOR**
of **BURNED BOOKS**
ROSEANNA M. WHITE

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



ROSEANNA M. WHITE

Roseanna M. White is a bestselling, Christy Award winning author who has long claimed that words are the air she breathes. When not writing fiction and launching her two homeschool grads onto the unsuspecting world, she's editing, designing book covers, and pretending her house will clean itself. Roseanna is the author of a slew of historical novels that span several continents and thousands of years. Spies and war and mayhem always seem to find their way into her books...to offset her real life, which is blessedly ordinary.

Being educated at St. John's College (the Great Books School) taught Roseanna to ask questions, to value conversation, and to never accept the simple answer without exploring it for herself. She and her family make their home in the mountains of West Virginia where she and her husband both grew up. Roseanna is a frequent speaker at writers events, women's conferences, and small groups of readers, and an unabashed champion of books...even the ones she doesn't like personally.

Have questions for Roseanna or want to ask about her joining your book club chat via Zoom? Just send her a note via email or on social media!

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Dear Reader,

I'll admit it. I don't read *every* book out there...no one does. But you might be surprised by the books I *do* read and *have* read. I read both Christian and mainstream bestsellers. I read nonfiction texts for devotion, spiritual growth, and historical research and study. I read books written during the eras I write about, even when the understanding or perspectives they espouse are far removed from our experience today. Wait, scratch that —*especially* when they're far removed.

I've read the original founders of the Roman Stoicism movement. Greek philosophers who waffle between high ideals and base living. Revolutionary political theorists that many in democratic society look upon as dangerous, like Marx and Neitzche, as well as the founding essays and documents of the United States. I've read scientific treatises that have been long-ago disproven. I've read mathematical texts about astronomy that we know aren't, strictly speaking, true.

Why? Because we can't understand where we are unless we know where we've come from. We can't understand modern breakthroughs if we don't know what came before. We cannot understand why a philosophy doesn't work if we don't understand what it's trying to do.

More and more in our world today, society is polarized, and many of us fall into the habit of building ourselves an echo chamber, where we only hear and read the thoughts that echo our own. But this too is dangerous. This, rather than propelling us forward into a mindset where we understand how to love our neighbor, drags us back into an "us versus them" tribalism.

When I began researching for *The Collector of Burned Books*, I thought it would be a story about extremists forcing their will on others. But in fact, I discovered it was a story hauntingly familiar to us even today. It was a story about a society that just wanted to return to its roots, its ideals, and to get rid of the "disgusting" voices of dissent. What they ended up doing was creating a society quick to denounce anyone who didn't keep perfectly in line.

The novel opens with the now-infamous student-led book burnings in Berlin of 1933. It seemed innocent enough at the time—just a group of students making a statement. It wasn't as if they were saying the books were illegal or that all copies ought to be destroyed. They just wanted the world to know what they stood for.

Retrospect paints that statement in a far different light. And so, amid that backdrop, comes the story of two professors from different worlds, two booklovers who recognize that there is an indelible link between freedom and books. Freedom and words. And when one is removed, the other quickly follows. This story is a romance, yes...but even more than that, it's a love story. A love story about readers and their books.

And it's a challenge. *Read more. Read widely. Read not to tear apart but to build up. Read to learn. Read to grow. And if you're not strong enough to handle what you read...then read more until you are.* When we do this, we truly understand what freedom means. And why it's worth...reading for.

Rosanna

Q&A with the AUTHOR

Where did you get the idea for *The Collector of Burned Books*?

I read a nonfiction book called *When Books Went to War*, which mentioned in passing a historical library called the Library of Burned Books in Paris, founded by the writers whose books were burned and banned by the Nazis in the 1930s. I was fascinated by this, especially when the author said that the library was “kept under lock and key” during the occupation of Paris. What, I wondered, was going on when it was “kept,” but not immediately destroyed? And what if a patron of the library had left some secrets inside?

What messages or themes do you focus on in the book?

As one might expect from the title and description, a huge theme in *The Collector of Burned Books* is the link between books and freedom. But more, it explores how quickly we can devolve from “I don’t like that idea” to “That idea is harmful” to “We have to get rid of that idea” to “We have to get rid of anybody who likes that idea.” It’s a slippery-slope that comes far more naturally to us than respect.

How does faith play a role in this story?

Both my hero and heroine are faithful Christians, and like all of us, they struggle with how to live that faith out...especially when it comes to forgiving the individuals *and* the regimes that try to harm them.

What’s one unexpected discovery you made while researching for the book?

Oh, there were more discoveries than I can count! But one that has really stuck with me was relatively small, just a detail, but it made the occupation so *real*—that because of the fumes released when the French military destroyed their fuel reserves to keep them out of Nazi hands, all the pigeons in Paris were dead within a few months of the occupation. For anyone who’s been to the City of Lights, that’s just unthinkable!

What advice would you give to someone who dreams of writing a book?

“Respect the dream.” Give the learning process the time it deserves. Most of us are in a rush to publication, but would we want someone performing surgery after two whole months of study? Of course not. Chasing the dream of writing is no different than chasing the dream of healing or being a missionary or building bridges. It deserves the same respect...and demands the same investment of time. And especially if you feel this is something the Lord has called to you, treat that time spent chasing it as something sacred...because your words can change the world!

Classic French Baguette



INGREDIENTS

- 500 grams / 3 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- 360 grams / 1 ½ cups + 1 tablespoon water
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon instant yeast
- 1 teaspoon honey

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Mix.** Mix all ingredients in a large bowl. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let it rest for 15 minutes.
2. **Work the dough.** Sprinkle a little more flour on the dough so you can work with it, then stretch and turn the dough, folding it onto itself. Flip it upside down. Do this three times over the course of about 90 minutes.
3. **Rise.** With the bowl covered again, let it rest on the counter overnight, or for 12-14 hours.
4. **Divide.** The next morning, divide the dough into two or three rectangles. Cover with a towel and let them rest for 45 minutes to 1 hour.
5. **Pre-heat your oven to 500.** To get the oven good and hot, start the heat cycle while the dough is resting, especially if you're baking on a baking stone (which is recommended). You need two oven racks for this process; the top one will hold your bread. On the bottom rack, you'll be putting a pan filled with boiling water. The steam it makes gives the baguette its classic crust.
6. **Shape the dough.** Stretch each rectangle and fold into a cylinder. Seal the seams and put it seam-down on parchment paper, baguette pans, or a couche. Let the dough rest for another 30 minutes.
7. **Score the loaves.** With a sharp knife, make diagonal cuts in each loaf.
8. **Add water to oven.** Fill a pan (an 8x8 or loaf pan works great) with boiling water and slide it onto the bottom rack of the oven.
9. **Bake.** Decrease oven to 475 and bake for 15 minutes. Remove the water, decrease temp to 450, and bake another 15 minutes.

Discussion Questions

1. Christian's father taught him that the only way to ever truly beat an enemy is to make him your friend. Historically, we see this as the way the Christian church has grown and flourished in times of persecution as well—not by overwhelming their oppressors, but by converting them through love. How does this play out in the story? Do you agree with the philosophy? Have you ever found it to be true in your own life?
2. Through Corinne's eyes, we get a peek at what life was like in Paris during those early days of the occupation. Was there anything that surprised you? Do you think you would have fled or remained behind?
3. Christian and his childhood friend Erik debated whether it was better to speak out against a regime they didn't approve of or instead work quietly to counteract them wherever they could—a decision many had to make in Nazi Germany. If you were in their place, what would you have decided? What did you think of Christian's decisions as they came to light throughout the story?
4. Though Corinne and Christian are ostensibly on very different sides, they find common ground through books, even before she realizes the truth of him. Have books ever helped you understand or connect with someone? What did you think of the progression of their friendship?
5. When Christian is reunited with Felix, we see his determination to love him "now," in whatever moments they had. How would your priorities shift if you had this constant awareness of what you could lose in the next moment? What did you think of this big revelation of what Christian was hiding?





Discussion Questions

6. When Christian is walking Corinne home at night, she reflects on the beauty of the night and reminds herself to count those small, unexpected blessings. How is this especially helpful when life is challenging? Is it something you've made a point of doing at any time in your life? What blessings do you think Corinne and Christian clung to in the years ahead?
7. Who was your favorite character? Your least favorite? Why?
8. Christian found himself in a position where he believed his staying would put those he loved in imminent danger. We, in retrospect, know that England would have been a safe haven, but people in 1940 truly believed it would fall within months. If you were in Christian's position, what would you have done? What did you think of how that part of the story played out?
9. After De Gaulle challenged every French citizen to resist, many found ways of doing just that, even when they had no idea what good, if any, it would do. But many more ended up embracing the "new normal" of life under Nazi rule and informing on neighbors and friends and even family in order to preserve themselves. Where do we make compromises today?
10. When it comes to topics of censorship, we all tend to bristle at the thought of someone banning *our* books . . . but we are also often quick to wish others' books were banned. How do we as a society decide how to handle these questions? Who should get to decide? Do the conversations had in this book help you understand your own views?

BURNED BOOKS READING LIST

The final list of banned and burned books that the Nazis put out was not, in fact, a list of *titles*, but rather a list of *authors*. Authors found themselves on this list for a variety of reasons. Most were: their own ethnicity, the subject matter of their books, or their politics. Below are some authors you're likely to recognize, and a few of their books that would have been out at the time and hence VERBOTEN (forbidden).

H. G. WELLS

The Time Machine
The Island of Dr. Moreau
The First Men in the Moon
The World Set Free

JACK LONDON

The Call of the Wild
White Fang
To Build a Fire
The Sea Wolf

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

The Great Gatsby
Babylon Revisited and Other Stories
Flappers and Philosophers
Tales of the Jazz Age

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

The Sun Also Rises
A Farewell to Arms
Green Hills of Africa
Death in the Afternoon

ERICH MARIA REMARQUE

All's Quiet on the Western Front

FELIX SALTEN

Bambi: A Life in the Woods

FRANZ KAFKA

The Metamorphosis
The Trial
The Castle
Amerika

THOMAS PAINE

Common Sense

SIGMUND FREUD

The Interpretation of Dreams
The Ego and the Id
Civilization and Its Discontents

HELEN KELLER

The Story of My Life
How I Became a Socialist
The World I Live in & Optimism

BERTOLD BRECHT

The Threepenny Opera

ALBERT EINSTEIN

Relativity: The Special and the General Theory

MARCEL PROUST

Swann's Way
In Search of Lost Time

J.R.R. TOLKIEN

The Hobbit

THOMAS MANN

The Magic Mountain
Death in Venice

MARK TWAIN

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court
The Prince and the Pauper

ARTICLE:

“Who are we canceling?”

Let's talk about Helen Keller.

You've probably heard of her. A childhood fever left her both blind and deaf, and yet she went on to become famous for being an author and activist for those with disabilities. I imagine you, like me, have heard her story and have stood amazed at how this brave soul overcame her obstacles.

When I learned that she was an author banned by the Nazis, it made sense to me—my research had included the sad fact that children born with disabilities were being forcibly euthanized by the late 1930s in Germany, and to my mind, it would make sense that they'd want to get rid of evidence like this woman who had overcome her disabilities and inspired others to do the same.

Turns out, I was missing a step. They didn't start by banning *all* books by Helen Keller (though they did by the end—the final Nazi ban list is of authors, not titles). Nope. They started by banning one. It was called *How I Became a Socialist*.

I'll admit it. I didn't realize (or remember, anyway) Helen Keller was a socialist. And when I saw this recently, do you know what my first reaction was? My heart sank. I drew back. And I thought, *Okay, maybe she's not the best example to start my series on books-banned-by-Nazi-Germany leading up to the release of The Collector of Burned Books. I'll keep looking.*

But then, over the next few days, my own reaction kept haunting me.

Why was I willing to dismiss someone's story just because I don't agree with her politics? She believed in an *idea*. Other people (myself included) disagree with that idea. But either way, she is still a remarkable person who did remarkable things and made a HUGE difference in this world.

Does one opinion, stance, or belief define a whole person? Is it reason to condemn a person? To stop listening to them entirely? To cancel them? To ban them?

Years ago, when what we've come to call “cancel culture” really began to gain ground, I spoke out against it. At the time, some of “my” books and understandings were being challenged or condemned or removed. Suddenly *Gone with the Wind* was on the “out” list, as was *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and of course, *Huckleberry Finn*. And I cried out, “NO! We have to keep reading these books! Even when we don't think like they do anymore, we HAVE to keep reading these books! They teach us so much about our history and the viewpoints they had and why they had them and why we DON'T anymore!”

Without knowing where we came from, we cannot understand where we are.

I cannot appreciate and deeply understand the “correct” facts if I don't know how we got here. What it's built on. What we *used* to believe. So “cancel culture” disturbs me at the deepest level. It's fine not to like a book or idea. It's great to reason through *why* and identify where we, and where society, has shifted and changed. To discuss whether those changes are good or bad. This is healthy. This is necessary.

But then tides shift, and those doing the cancelling begin to lose control. What, then, is our response?

All too often throughout human history, our answer is to cancel them right back. “You try to take away my books? Well, take this! I’ll take away *yours*.” We react exactly like I reacted to Helen Keller. We draw back from the people whose viewpoints don’t exactly align with our own, and we begin to cancel *them* because of one belief or stance or viewpoint.

Now, there is a lot of nuance to this topic. We cannot read everything. We cannot teach everything. We have to make decisions. We have to decide what we promote. What we condone. And we’re never all going to agree on that. But even when we teach this thing...we still have to *preserve* that “other” thing, especially when there are still people who believe it. Especially at certain levels—*higher* levels. Colleges, universities. Governments. These places, above all, need to preserve. To collect. To explore. To invite reflection. To teach respectful dialogue.

Because when we remove a book...it’s usually not long before we remove the author. When we cancel an idea...it’s usually not long before we cancel the people who hold that idea.

I’m guilty of it. Are you? Is this how God *wants* us to view each other? His children?

I promise you here and now: we will disagree about *something*, you and I. Maybe it’s a fine point of faith. Maybe it’s a political view. Maybe it’s got something to do with science or medicine. Maybe it has to do with marriage and divorce. Or abortion. Or whether purple is really the most beautiful color in the world (I mean, *dub...*). Some of our disagreements we’ll laugh over (like colors). Some we’ll be distressed by. All, we can learn from each other about. We can have conversations that aren’t about *winning*, but about *learning*.

Let’s default to love, and to looking at our own hearts FIRST. Let’s default not to canceling, but to considering. And let’s never, never make the mistake of dismissing a *person* because of an *idea*.

Meet the Characters



CORINNE

Corinne Bastien may constantly be mistaken for a student, but she is in fact a professor of linguistics and philosophy at the Sorbonne, one of Paris's most prestigious universities. Having made her home for the last seven years beside the German Library of Burned Books, she has secrets irrevocably yoked to that library, full of every book the Nazis hate...secrets meant to aid the Allies in reclaiming the city she loves...secrets that could get her killed by Paris's occupiers if anyone discovers them.

CHRISTIAN

Christian Bauer has been an enemy of the Nazi Party longer than most of the world knew to fear them. But when Goebbels sends him to Paris to "relocate" France's libraries, he knows refusing would mean being sent to a concentration camp. So he dons the hated Nazi uniform and sets up his headquarters at the Library of Burned Books. Though determined to help all those he can while in Paris, Christian walks a dangerous line. Because if his superiors discover what he's been hiding and where his loyalties really lie, a concentration camp is the best he can hope for.



MY NOTES & QUESTIONS

