

Book Reviews

Bosmajian, Haig. *Burning Books*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2006. 233p. alk. paper, \$39.95 (ISBN 9780786422081). LC 2005-35201.

Haig Bosmajian's comprehensive work, *Burning Books*, explores worldwide incidents of book burnings throughout history and the roles that authors play in these destructive rituals. As he states in the Preface, "The horrific history of exterminating books, sometimes exterminating the authors at the same time, is as much a part of current history as it was of earlier times." Bosmajian continues by outlining the history of book destruction around the world from the 15th to the 20th century. He also examines the metaphoric language that accompanies the act of book burnings; examples of this language include "pestilence, poison, vermin, cancer, and virus."

The book is divided into four main chapters: "The Magic of Books and Fire," "Burning Blasphemous-Heretical Books," "Burning Seditious-Subversive Books," and "Burning Obscene-Immoral Books." It also includes an introduction, conclusion, bibliography, and index. The content throughout the book focuses on the historical events, and their implications, of burning books. In addition to outlining historical events, Bosmajian highlights the fact that book burners often held these rituals publicly in the hopes of showing the community "...what the minds of the authors of the condemned books had produced." Bosmajian also juxtaposes specific book burning incidents with concurrent international events.

"The Magic of Books and Fire" is an interesting spin in which Bosmajian makes both realistic and abstract connections between books, magic, power, mystery, fire, and book burning rituals. Bosmajian walks the reader through the centuries and defines what books and manuscripts meant to different sets of people: religious

and nonreligious, and literate and illiterate. He argues that fire was one of the few methods that communities used to get rid of witches, moles, diseases, and anything that was seen as seditious.

Overall, this first chapter effectively ties together historical events, the origin and evolution of the book-burning phenomenon, and the language used to describe it throughout the centuries.

The next few chapters explore the various types of books being burned, as well as the assorted laws and proclamations that were created to justify these rituals. Each chapter is divided into broad categories by types of books, which are then discussed in chronological order. The three types of books that Bosmajian discusses are blasphemous-heretical books, seditious-subversive books, and obscene-immoral books. Bosmajian highlights within these chapters additional resources pertaining to international book burnings. He also examines the progression of various types of languages and phrases that have been associated with burned books and provides a plethora of detail associated with the "why" and "what for" of books being diminished to ashes throughout the centuries.

The last chapter, "Burning Obscene-Immoral Books," is of particular interest because the author sheds light on the rise of burning obscene books, rather than ones that were religiously and politically controversial. Bosmajian defines obscene books as "'dirt,' 'filth,' and 'slime' since obscenity is associated with the body, nudity, sex, and excretion. The graphic description of nudity or sexual intercourse becomes 'dirt' and 'smut'." In attempting to explain the growth of obscene and immoral books being burned, Bosmajian states, "As long as obscene books were available only to the rich and educated,



ensorship of such works was minimal; it was only when secular authorities felt it necessary to protect the morality of an increasingly literate citizenry that anti-obscenity laws and decisions appear in significantly greater number." Bosmajian covers the various aspects involved in categorizing a book as obscene or immoral and demonstrates how language was employed to determine the ultimate fate of the book and sometimes the author.

This book is a great resource for anyone interested in studying the act of book burning across the world and throughout the centuries. Bosmajian has done an excellent job of gathering information from external resources and brings the content together in a concise historical account of book-burning rituals. Additionally, the author approaches this subject in a unique fashion by dividing the burned into broad categories of types of books and leading the reader through a chronological history of each category. Furthermore, Bosmajian's knowledge and research regarding the types of metaphorical language associated with book-burning rituals is superb. Besides having a usable index, this book also contains an extensive bibliography. I would recommend this book for anyone in the book business or higher education, to book lovers, and to the book burners themselves!—*Katie Nash, Elon University.*

Frank, David John, and Jay Gabler. *Reconstructing the University: Worldwide Shifts in Academia in the 20th Century.* Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006. 248p. alk. paper, \$19.95 (paper); \$50 (cloth) (ISBN 0804753768; 080475375X). LC 2006-6596.

A December 2006 story in the Web-based news outlet *Inside Higher Education* describes a "divisive semester" at the University of Florida with which many of us would be familiar: budget deficits, administrative turnover, and mournful laments about a pervasive lack of commitment to the study of the humanities.¹

There is a widespread sentiment in institutions of higher education across the United States that the humanities are in decline. In the decade since the publication of *What's Happened to the Humanities?* (1997), this sentiment has found expression in cleverly titled works such as *Who Killed Shakespeare?* (2001) and *Bonfire of the Humanities* (2001), which decry the meager funding and institutional support accorded to scholars and students in fields such as English Literature, Philosophy, and Classics. The problem with works such as these, argue Frank and Gabler, is that they are based largely on anecdotal evidence and rhetorical flourish. They articulate a broad set of concerns about perceived changes in the academic curriculum in recent decades, but they provide little hard evidence regarding the extent of these changes. Other studies of curriculum history, they continue, while more measured in tone, rarely extend beyond the study of the evolution of a single discipline or field. Put simply: How much do we really know about the ways in which the academic curriculum has changed during the 20th century, and how might we go about gathering evidence about curricular change in ways that transcend the limits of the current literature?

In a study of impressive scope, Frank and Gabler aim to answer these questions through an analysis of trends in faculty demographics and course composition from institutions around the world. What were the specific differences in the degree programs offered at the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium) in 1930 and those offered at the same institution in 2005? Or, what were the changes in the composition of the faculty in British Commonwealth universities between 1915 and 1995 by disciplinary affiliation? From primary source data such as these, the authors construct a complex argument about the history and philosophy of the academic curriculum and about the ways in which changes in prevailing perceptions of reality affect the distribution of