

One of my themes is contained in this and other poems in this collection. What can I say? I am an English teacher married to another English teacher! Books are life. They are refuge. They are classrooms. People who do not read have lessened their understanding of the world and the people who live (and have lived) in it immensely.

People have risked their lives to be able to read. Ask the American slaves who were forbidden from learning how to read and write. Ask the Jewish children in Nazi Germany and its associates whose right to read and learn was torn from them as they watched their books burn. Ask the fictional Guy Montag, whose job it was in the dystopian novel *Fahrenheit 451* to burn books so that his autocratic government could maintain its hold on its society. (At least this novel has a semi-happy ending, with the book people having memorized great books of all kinds, ready to get them into print should the long-awaited revolution ever come.)

Read Bertolt Brecht's poem "The Burning of the Books" and appreciate that we live in a society which is rich in novels, plays, books of philosophy and history and poetry and so much more. The things we take for granted are too often the things we end up missing.

### **The Burning of the Books**

When the Regime  
commanded the unlawful books to be burned,  
teams of dull oxen hauled huge cartloads to the  
bonfires.

Then a banished writer, one of the best,  
scanning the list of excommunicated texts,  
became enraged: he'd been excluded!

He rushed to his desk, full of contemptuous  
wrath,  
to write fierce letters to the morons in power —  
Burn me! he wrote with his blazing pen —  
Haven't I always reported the truth?  
Now here you are, treating me like a liar!  
Burn me!