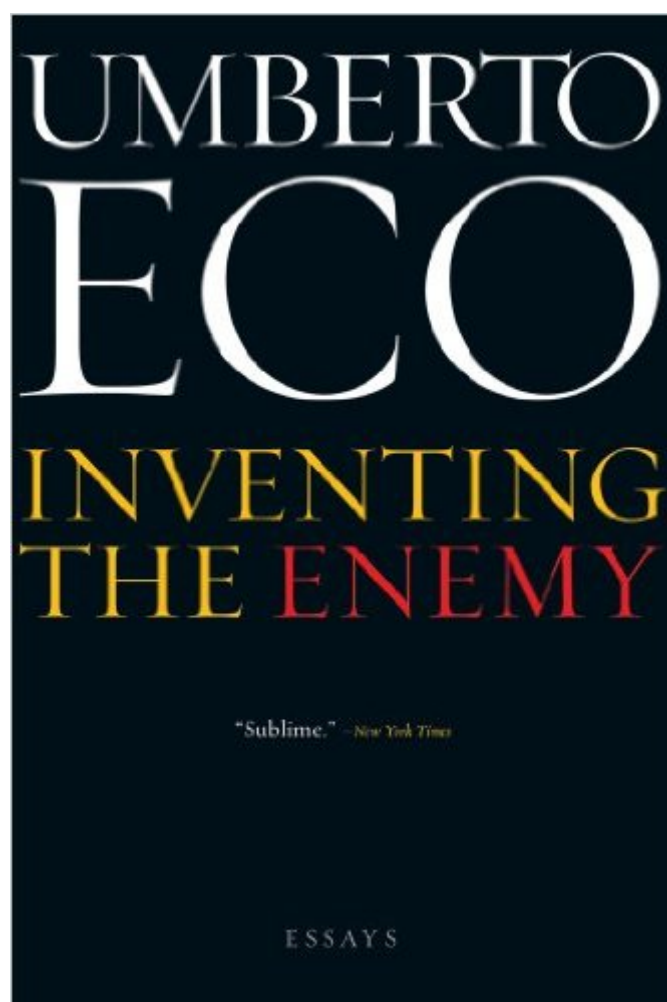


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Inventing The Enemy: Essays



Synopsis

â œUnderscores the writerâ™s profound erudition, lively wit, and passion for ideas of all shapes and sizes . . . Ecoâ™s pleasure in such explorations is obvious and contagious.â • â ”

BooklistInventing the Enemy covers a wide range of topics on which Eco has written and lectured over the past ten years: from a disquisition on the theme that runs through his recent novel *The Prague Cemetery* â ” every country needs an enemy, and if it doesnâ™t have one, must invent it â ” to a discussion of ideas that have inspired his earlier novels (and in the process he takes us on an exploration of lost islands, mythical realms, and the medieval world); from indignant reviews of James Joyceâ™s *Ulysses* by fascist journalists of the 1920s and 1930s, to an examination of Saint Thomas Aquinasâ™s notions about the soul of an unborn child, to censorship and violence and WikiLeaks. These are essays full of passion, curiosity, and obsession by one of the worldâ™s most esteemed scholars and critically acclaimed, best-selling novelists.â œTrue wit and wisdom coexist with fierce scholarship inside Umberto Eco, a writer who actually knows a thing or two about being truly human.â • â ” Buffalo News"Thought provoking . . . nuanced . . . the collection amply shows off Eco's sophisticated, agile mind." â ” Publishers Weekly

Book Information

File Size: 3382 KB

Print Length: 241 pages

Publisher: Mariner Books (September 4, 2012)

Publication Date: September 4, 2012

Sold by:Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B006R8PIII

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #560,997 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #117

inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Regional & Cultural > European > Italian

#906 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Literature & Fiction > Essays & Correspondence > Essays

#3160 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Criticism &

Customer Reviews

First introduced to Umberto Eco after seeing the 1986 film "The Name of the Rose" shortly after it was released, I was enthusiastically describing the performances by Sean Connery and F. Murray Abraham to a friend. She asked if I had read the book, which I had not, and she offered to loan me her copy. I read it and had to get my own, and *The Name of the Rose* became a personal favorite, closely followed by Foucault's *Pendulum* (1988), my favored conspiracy theory novel. But the author is also an excellent essayist, and his new title *Inventing the Enemy: Essays* does not disappoint. Always informative, often thought provoking, and frequently entertaining, this one will appeal to fans of this Italian novelist, philosopher, semiotician and literary critic. For those who are new to Umberto Eco and want a sampler, it's an excellent place to start. The title essay here, "Inventing the Enemy" is the first, and ties in to a topic of his earlier novel, *The Prague Cemetery*, by illustrating how the presence of an enemy is essential to a nation's success.

Inventing the Enemy and Other Occasional Writings is an exceptionally eclectic collection of previously published or presented essays written in a variety of styles, from scholastic to wistful, and dense to delightful. Just as I was in a café reading the first essay, "Inventing the Enemy" a young man with Planet Enemy walked by. In Eco's piece, from a lecture at Bologna University on May 15, 2008, he explores the notion of the enemy - who we, collectively and individually, regard as our historical enemies, but also our cultural enemies, whether real or perceived or invented. For example, he cites ancient to contemporary texts to illustrate his point, from Marcus Cicero's 63BC *Orations against Catiline* to Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit* (1944) to George Orwell's *Nineteen Eight-Four* (1949), as well as historical events (global conflicts). He writes of people's intolerance of other races, lower classes, and of people who are different from "us." "The enemy is ugly," he states, and adds, "The need (for an enemy) is second nature even to a mild man of peace. In his case the image of the enemy is simply shifted from a human object to a natural or social force that in some way threatens us and has to be defeated, whether it be capitalistic exploitation, environmental pollution, or third-world hunger." Basing our lives on "this Other" and finding "this Other intolerable because to some degree he is not us" we "create our own hell," Eco writes. The enemy springs from our own fears, insecurities, intolerances, and even virtuous causes. So when we see Planet Enemy on a T-shirt we remember our own fictional heroes and villains, but we may also reflect on good versus evil, and them against us.

Umberto Eco (The Name of the Rose, Foucault's Pendulum, Baudolino, The mysterious Flame of Queen Loana, The Prague Cemetery) is an Italian semiotician, essayist, philosopher, literary critic, and novelist. This collection offers fourteen 'occasional pieces', or writing created for specific events and in essence are thought provoking and sometimes intimidating essays. Though always maintaining the dignity and stance of a humanities academic, Eco appears to play joyfully through topics, such as the human need for enemies; the beauty, importance, and history of fire; whether the fallout from WikiLeaks will require espionage technology to regress to "a lonely street corner, at midnight." Most of these dazzling little words adhere to conventional essay formats, two humorous collage-style works (one on the danger of proverbs, another composed of Fascist critiques of Ulysses) provide the kind of spice for which the dour Eco is known. Avoiding exaggeration, Eco's thoughts are nuanced, reserved, and refreshingly reader friendly. Some of the essays do become thick with content and may in those cases put off the light reader. He often jumps into a topic in medias res (not providing too significant background information for his subject at hand), often dipping into other languages without bothering to translate his quotes. Some readers will find the writing and the subjects a bit too obtuse, but for those who love the melodic manner in which he writes so seductively well, then this collection will well satisfy. and seems reluctant to clue in readers to helpful background information, as hinted at by many a snippet quotation in another language included without translation or elaboration.

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