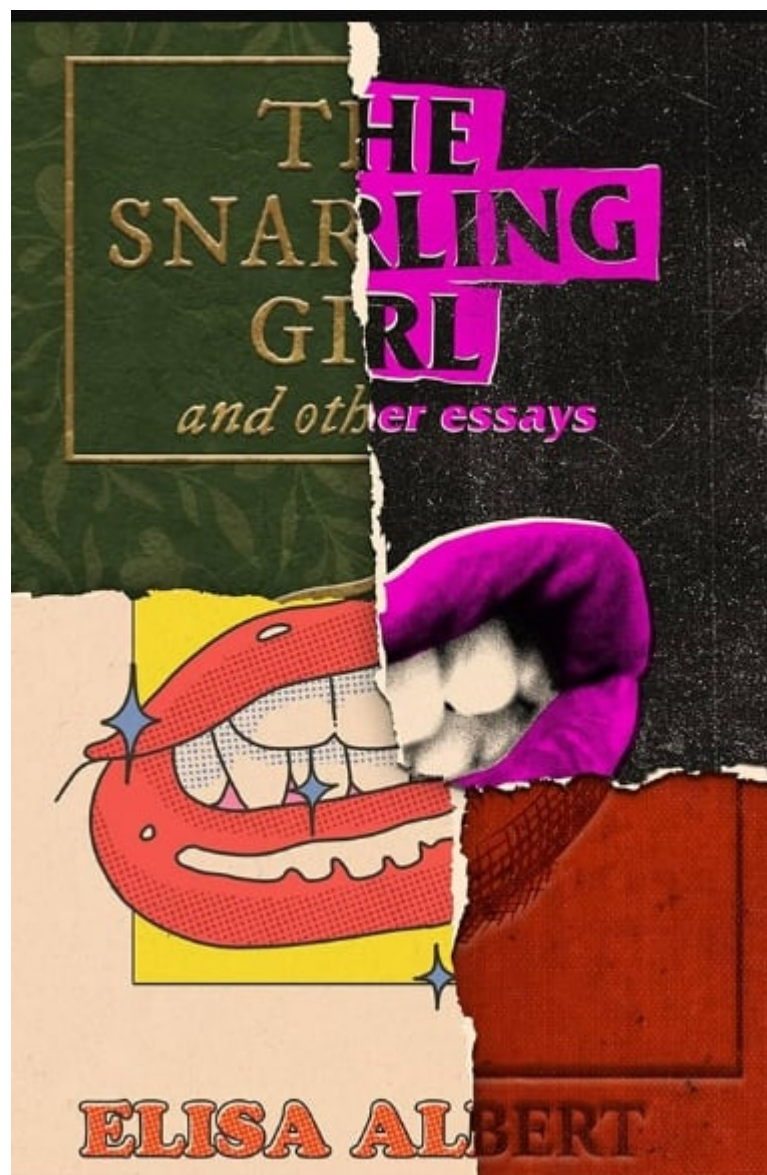


Shame on the Writers Who Refused to Appear at a Book Festival with Elisa Albert

From Phyllis Chesler.

This is Neal Pollack writing in the [Book and Film Globe](#)

“Shanda” is a word in Yiddish, that most useful of languages, that means an action that’s a shame, a scandal, a disgrace, and a general embarrassment. I can think of few actions more shanda-like in recent times than the decision of the [Albany](#)



[Book Festival](#) to cancel a panel meant for moderation by the writer Elisa Albert, author of, most recently, the book of essays ‘[The Snarling Girl](#)’. Two of the authors involved refused to appear with Albert because of her “Zionist” beliefs. Shame on the Book Festival for not having the courage to stand up for Albert. And double, triple, quadruple shame on the writers, Lisa Ko and Aisha Abdel Gawad. They are fools, they are bigots, they are the opposite of everything that is good in the world. We wish them to obscurity for

their bottomless intolerance.

The Book Festival called the cancellation “unfortunate,” and it is that, but it’s also more. It’s horrifying, and even more so because it’s of a piece with recent developments in the literary world. This is the third major incident of Jewish-related cancellation this year. . .

These denunciations of “Zionists” aren’t coming from the political right, or from the kinds of cranks who used to write angry letters to the editor. These are “literary” people—writers, bookstore employees, people who organize festivals. But cancelling Jewish writers is the absolute opposite of how “literary” people should behave in public and in private. We should advocate for tolerance of people of all races and backgrounds, and for open debate across the political spectrum. Freedom of speech is what allows a literary culture to exist at all, and freedom of association should be the top priority. . .

This new class of literary people operates in an opposing sphere of intolerance, and of cancellation, and, most importantly, of anti-Semitism. Imagine if a writer refused to appear on a panel with someone because they were Black, or a bookstore employee demanded a boycott of a book with queer themes, or if a festival canceled a panel of Latino authors. Such things would never happen in a modern literary setting. Nor could they. The world wouldn’t tolerate it. So why, then, do we tolerate it when people refuse to appear with and patronize Jews?

Don’t tell me that “Zionist” and Jewish aren’t the same thing. Because in this context, they absolutely are. . . In a universe of public discourse where everyone who disagrees with anyone is a Nazi, that’s literally Nazi talk right there.

There’s clearly been a change in the literary world since I made my debut on bookshelves nearly 25 years ago. The lit

world has always been left-leaning. But a quarter of a century ago, it was also a *lot* more Jewish. . . . America, and the literary world, has grown more diverse. But Jews still need a place at the table they helped set. If you are trying to ban or cancel “Zionist” writers, then you’re no friend to literature, you’re no friend to the values of freedom and tolerance, and you’re no friend to humanity.

We cannot allow this mindset to continue, and we must continue to call it out whenever it appears. The Elisa Albert situation in Albany may be a small item involving one panel at a provincial book festival. But it’s also a sign that not is all well with our times. People of good conscience need to stand with Jewish writers and artists right now, and not be quiet about this evil that’s creeping over our culture. Stand with normal Jewish people, and stand against the fucking twits who don’t want to sit with them in public. If you don’t, then that shanda will mark you for the rest of your days.

The above was edited highlights. Read it [all here.](#)