

For May 16th 2024

I think it is time we talked about Salman Rushdie and the fatwa against him as an example of what is NOT freedom of speech.

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Please read this newsletter from The Times and think about what else you know about books and people being threatened. You may also notice something in your newspapers etc about this new book.

10 The BBC wrote 15th April 24: **‘Sir Salman Rushdie has spoken in chilling detail to the BBC about what he remembers of the attack two years ago, in which he was stabbed on stage.**

The Booker Prize-winning author said his eye was left hanging down his face "like a soft-boiled egg", and that losing the eye "upsets him every day".

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Letter from The Times before publication (*Veröffentlichung*) of *KNIFE*. 14.4.24

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Knife. That’s the punchy (punch = hit, box) provocative and evocative title of Salman Rushdie’s memoir, which is published (sold) next week. Subtitled ***Meditations After an Attempted (tried) Murder***, it’s the author’s story of what happened on August 12, 2022, when a man in black attacked him on stage at a literary event in New York. His first thought was: So it’s you. Here you are. Rushdie had been waiting for this dark moment for 33 years.

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We’ve not seen the book yet because it’s under lock and key, but it’s one of the big literary events of the year. I can’t wait to read it. But preparing for this, I’ve been reading his 2012 memoir, ***Joseph Anton***, his account (story) of living under the constant threat (*Drohung*) of murder.

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On February 14, 1989, the decrepit (*klapprig*), dying Iranian dictator, Ayatollah Khomeini, issued a fatwa – “My Unfunny Valentine” is how Rushdie wittily puts it – saying all believers should kill him for blasphemy. Rushdie’s crime was to write a novel, ***The Satanic Verses***.

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Joseph Anton is in turn angry, witty, moving, ironic, gossipy, high-principled (*mit strengen Grundsätzen*). It’s a powerful read, a fascinating account (story, *Bericht*) of learning to live under a death sentence (*Todesurteil*), of trying to find the freedom to lead a relatively normal life. Once the fatwa was announced, he couldn’t return to his home. Instead a peripatetic

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(*rastlos*), hidden existence began, moving from this friend's second home to a friend-of-that-friend's apartment. The indoorsy private writer, used to
45 (*gewöhnt*) the solitude of his writing room, found himself in the near permanent company of his police protection officers.

There are great cameos (*Kurzauftritt?*): he was invited to lunch with Graham Greene: "Greene's long form was folded into a deep armchair, but
50 the great man sprang to his feet and cried, 'Rushdie! Come and sit here and tell me how you managed to (*wie Du es geschafft hast*) make so much trouble! I never made nearly as much trouble as that!' This was oddly comforting (*tröstend*)." Alas, there are also reminders that not all writers were willing to defend a writer in peril (*in Gefahr*). John le Carré thought
55 Rushdie a troublemaker, who got what he deserved (*was er verdient hatte*).

I also liked his telling of how one of his bodyguards left his gun behind when visiting Hanif Kureishi at home. As they were leaving Kureishi "sprinted out into the street, looking very pleased with himself, and waving a handgun in
60 its leather holster above his head. 'Oi,' Hanif shouted delightedly, 'You forgot your shooter.'"

What is your favourite memoir by a novelist? Email using the details below and I'll feature one or two of the best responses in the "Your thoughts"
65 section next week.

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70 Trivia question: What was Salman Rushdie's first novel? Find the answer at the bottom of the newsletter.

75 If you want to know the facts. Look up :
<https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-68739586>