

Awarding
Peace Prize of the German Book Trade 2023
Sunday, October 22, 2023

Salman Rushdie

All Speeches

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Certificate

The German Publishers and Booksellers Association
awards the 2023 Peace Prize
of the German Book Trade to

Salman Rushdie

From the moment his masterpiece »Midnight's Children« was published in 1981, Salman Rushdie has awed us with his interpretations of migration and global politics. In his novels and non-fiction, he melds narrative foresight with unfailing literary innovation, humour and wisdom. His work chronicles the force used by oppressive regimes to destroy entire societies while also celebrating the indestructible spirit of resistance displayed by individual human beings.

Ever since Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa against Salman Rushdie in 1989, the author has lived under serious and constant threat to his life. And yet he remains a passionate defender of freedom of thought and expression – just as equally for himself as for those whose views he does not share. He thus accepts great personal risk in his enduring defence of an essential prerequisite for peaceful human co-existence.

In August 2022, shortly before the publication of his most recent novel, Victory City, a violent attempt was made on his life. Today, despite still wrestling with massive physical and psychological consequences, he continues to write with great imagination and deep humanity. We honour Salman Rushdie for his indomitable spirit, for his affirmation of life and for enriching our world with his love of storytelling.

German Publishers and Booksellers Association

Chairwoman

Karin Schmidt-Friderichs

Frankfurt am Mai, Church of St. Paul, October 22, 2023

Mike Josef

Lord Mayor of the City of Frankfurt am Main

Greeting

We are here today in Frankfurt's Church of St. Paul to bestow the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade on Salman Rushdie, an outstanding writer and a courageous warrior in the battle for freedom of expression and freedom of the press. I am convinced that you, dear Mr. Rushdie, are the perfect recipient of this award, especially at our present moment in history. The Peace Prize of the German Book Trade has been handed out in Frankfurt's Church of St. Paul since 1951, just one year after the award was created. And it is entirely fitting that the prize continues to be bestowed in the Church of St. Paul, for this is a place of words, a site of debate. Exactly 175 years ago, the Frankfurt Parliament granted the people of Germany the basic rights they had long been fighting for, including freedom of expression and freedom of the press. The censorship that had been omnipresent until then was abolished here in the Church of St. Paul. The Peace Prize found a home in the Church of St. Paul because this site has been a refuge for democratic values since 1848. Values such as human rights, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, peace and democracy. The life and artistic output of this year's award recipient reflect these values of peace and freedom of expression. The Church of St. Paul has played a series of meaningful roles in the course of history. In 1848, it became the »cradle of German democracy«, and in 1944, its ruins symbolised the horror and destruction of the Nazi dictatorship. Only after its reconstruction did the church once again become a symbol of the fundamental values of liberty and equality.

Walter Kolb, the first mayor of Frankfurt after WWII, worked tirelessly to ensure the reconstruction of the church. In a post-war era marked by severe shortages, reconstruction was only possible thanks to a consolidation of efforts. I would like to briefly quote Walter Kolb's vision in his own words: »May our commitment to peace, both foreign and domestic,

and our desire to cooperate with all well-meaning, democratic nations emanate outwards from the Church of St. Paul into the hearts of people all over the world and thereby strengthen our collective hope for true, long-lasting peace«. The forthcoming House of Democracy will take up and continue this process – as an open project that fosters political education, democratic values – and the culture of debate.

Prior to the German Revolution of 1848, the job of bookseller was one of the most dangerous professions in the country. A Frankfurt-based police organisation known as the *Bundeszentralbehörde* was responsible for much of the intellectual repression of the day. The following entry can be found, among many others, in their archives: »Meidinger, Johann, bookseller in Frankfurt and Rödelheim, 41 years old, arrested for disseminating revolutionary writings«. Other examples are Heine, Herwegh and Schiller. The censorship and persecution of writers and publishers finally came to an end with the proclamation of fundamental human rights by the Frankfurt Parliament. At least that's what the democrats and revolutionaries of 1848 thought. Of course, things turned out differently. The Frankfurt Parliament ultimately failed to achieve what it set out to do. Members of parliament, among them many writers, philosophers and thinkers, were persecuted and driven into exile. The sought-after unification of a German nation did not take place until many years later, after the winning of a war. Censorship continued to abound. Upon gaining power in 1933, the Nazis went even further than just censorship and persecution. They openly displayed their contempt for ideas and human rights. They burned books by authors they found disagreeable. A book burning took place in Frankfurt on 10 Mai 1933, here at the Römerberg. In the years that followed, almost the entire literary

elite, from Bertolt Brecht and Nelly Sachs to Stefan Zweig, was driven into exile.

My fellow booklovers, the Nazis were not able to banish the books of Frankfurt exile writers from our city. Frankfurt is a city of books. The first book fair is documented to have taken place here in 1437. And in 1948, in spite of a paper shortage, the Frankfurt Book Fair was held here in the Church of St. Paul. This year, in 2023, we thus marked the opening of the 75th book fair since WWII. The collections of the German National Library in Frankfurt bear witness to the lives of individuals persecuted during the Nazi Regime. In the German Exile Archive 1933-1945, visitors will find manuscripts and relics documenting the expulsion of the free spirit from Germany. I only recommend their permanent exhibition on exile.

From its very inception, the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade has been committed to preserving freedom of expression and providing support for persecuted individuals. The first recipient experienced first-hand the misery of expulsion and exile. Max Tau received the award on 3 June 1950, having only narrowly escaped being murdered in the 1940s. Max Tau had believed in the good of his fellow human beings, but he had also overlooked the dangers of the times in which he lived. He wrote the following about his youth: »We were busy gazing at the stars. We did not notice what was going on in the world«. The evil that took over the world at that moment in history almost swallowed him whole.

In the time of crisis in which we find ourselves today, we readers, writers, authors and publishers – and all thinking people in general – cannot permit ourselves to overlook what is going on in the world. It is essential that we remind ourselves that creative people like Salman Rushdie, our Peace Prize recipient this year, continue to be threatened and unfortunately also attacked by fanatics. But we need the peacemaking efforts of these creative people, their work as intercultural mediators, now more than ever. The danger is omnipresent in the digital world as well. News items have a shorter and shorter

expiry date. Misinformation, manipulated information and hate can be disseminated at the speed of light. But we simply cannot let this divide us. Precisely for this reason, as our world undergoes a digital transformation, it is important that we have reliable points of reference. Books, the written word and epic narratives such as those written by this year's recipient, provide a counterpoint. Indeed, multi-layered stories exploring social developments and philosophical reflections give us much-needed orientation. They are important building blocks in the foundation of democratic societies. They foster our mutual understanding. I encourage all of us to make our own individual contribution to fostering freedom of expression. Let us build bridges – in the digital world as well! Let us talk about war and peace, about freedom and the absence of freedom. Let us never prohibit ourselves from speaking. We owe this to our children, to our democracy and to the generations to come.

Dear Mr. Rushdie, you are a role model.

You have conveyed those very same values embodied by the Frankfurt Parliament throughout the world. You are also a symbol for the communication between East and West. I recently read some of the stories in your book »East, West«, and I saw that you once described yourself as the comma between those two words. I believe today's award ceremony is strong evidence of the significance of that otherwise unassuming comma.

Thank you for your commitment to peace and freedom of expression. You have said that you always enjoy coming to Frankfurt.

On behalf of the City of Frankfurt am Main, I would like to say that you will always be welcome in this city of books, this city of words. We are delighted that you are here. Congratulations!

Translated into English by The Hagedorn Group.

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Karin Schmidt-Friderichs

President of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association

Greeting

One hundred and seventy-five years ago, in the spring of 1848, brave men and women risked life and limb taking to the barricades in Germany. They called for freedom of expression and freedom of the press, and their demands ultimately led to the Frankfurt Constitution of 1848. Here in this room the first democracy in Germany took shape. It would last for a short time only. And yet it would serve as the basis for our Grundgesetz of 1949 - which, in turn, would become the blueprint for other democratic constitutions all over the world. Today, this democracy is under threat. Today, there are increasingly more autocracies in the world than democratically governed countries. Today, half of Germans say they have little faith in democracy. It is painful to speak this aloud in this room.

Dear Salman Rushdie, the opportunity to honour your life's work here today, in this space, has a very special meaning for me, because although yesterday's rehearsal was your first time being in this room, the history of Frankfurt's Church of St. Paul - a history marked by freedom and self-determination - is interwoven with your own biography in many ways, almost like the strands of one of your masterly novels ... In the year you were born, India declared its independence after a long period of non-violent resistance. In that same year, here, at this location, the foundation stone was laid for the reconstruction of the Church of St. Paul, which had burned to the ground in a bombing raid. The same year your father sent you, at the age of 14, to boarding school in England, the future President of India, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, was awarded the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade here in the Church of St. Paul. In 1975, your first novel, »Grimus«, was published by the publishing house of Victor Gollancz, a pacifist and Peace Prize recipient.

In 1989, the same year in which you began your life in hiding, the Wall that had divided Germany and functioned as the very embodiment of the Cold War, came crumbling down. Today, some would say the Cold War was replaced by religious fanaticism. What we are witnessing in Israel and Gaza right now unfortunately strengthens this theory - my deepest sympathy goes to the civilians who are victims of this fanaticism! In that same year of 1989, we honoured Václav Havel with the Peace Prize. He could not receive the prize in person, as he would not have been allowed to return to his country. His chair in the Church of St. Paul remained empty. Four weeks later, Václav Havel was elected as the first president of the new, free Czechoslovak Republic.

The fact that you, dear Salman Rushdie, are here today, to receive the Peace Prize in person - after the attack on your life last year - borders on the miraculous. Doctors, your family and friends - and above all your wife, Rachel Eliza Griffiths - saved your life. Their efforts fill us with overwhelming gratitude.

Dear Guests, the young Salman Rushdie wanted nothing else, than to become a writer. He earned a living as an ad copywriter, wrote his first stories, proved that he - like many other writers whose works are overlooked in the jungle of literature - had perseverance, yet he also showed signs of impatience. Already in his first novel he wove a tapestry of mythology and magic, religion and philosophy. After that, a journey taken through the country of his birth became the driving force behind his writing. He published his second novel, »Midnight's Children« - and it marked a turning point. Overnight, Salman Rushdie became a leading figure on the international literary scene, receiving the highest awards, including the Booker Prize. And then Salman Rushdie wrote the book that would make him

famous across the globe, but that would also change his life irrevocably. The book tells the story of two men who, against all odds, survive a plane crash. It is a story in which a fictional character exhibits biographical similarities to a religious founder. A few days after publication, »The Satanic Verses« was banned in his home country of India. Six months after that, the Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran issued a fatwa against him. Ayatollah Khomeini called on Muslims all over the world, to kill the writer issuing a bounty of 2 million US dollars. Carolin Emcke – Peace Prize recipient in 2016 – has depicted, what it is like, when one’s voice falls silent in the face of death. Serhiy Zhadan – last year’s Peace Prize recipient – spoke of losing his literary voice in the face of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. By threatening him with death, the plan was to deprive Salman Rushdie, too, of his literary voice.

When fiction is no longer allowed to be fiction, but instead becomes real and life-threatening for the author, then those of us in the book trade must raise our voice. We must take a stand. Provide assistance. Because those stories of the world – the ones that Salman Rushdie’s protagonist Harun finds in the sea of stories – are not only our bread and butter. They are part of our DNA, they hold humanity together.

Dear Salman Rushdie, it is not possible for those of us who have not experienced it ourselves to know what existential fear can do to a person. That is, unless a gifted writer elucidates it for us in a book. In 2012, you published your book »Joseph Anton«. In it, you provide the world with a glimpse into these years in which you lived under constant protection in ever-changing locations. In secret. Your report is unsparing. And honest. Open. Radical. Intimate. Brilliant. You describe self-doubt and fear. Courage and also anger. You describe how you found words again. And the impact of fear on love. This book, in which you transform an oppressive reality into impressive literature, marked your comeback to the literary

stage, which from that point on became a political stage – at least wherever you appeared on it. You never mince words. You put your finger in the wounds that have been inflicted upon freedom of expression. Your literary oeuvre alone – which Daniel Kehlmann will survey in a moment – truly deserves to be the exclusive subject of our attention today. And yet, you must live with the fact that we will always associate your name with the fatwa issued against you.

Dear Guests, today, we honour a man who, despite all he’s been through, raises his voice and stands up for the freedom of thought and the freedom of the word. A person who has given us many wise words and much food for thought. A person whose fictional narratives hold up a mirror to reality. A person from whom we can learn what courage means. When asked how he managed to avoid becoming fearful and bitter, he answered: »That would have meant a different kind of death«.

We need role models like Salman Rushdie in a time in which the chain reactions of intimidation – be it by religious fanatics, be it by online internet mobs – are having an impact.

We just cannot take freedom of expression and democratic constitutions for granted. People have taken to the streets for such things. People have risked and given their lives for such things. We all – and especially those of us in the book trade – have a responsibility, to defend these values.

Let us, at this historic location, learn from Salman Rushdie. And honour him in doing so!

Thank you.

Translated into English by The Hagedorn Group.

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Daniel Kehlmann

»Falling from the Sky and living to tell the Tale«

Laudation

Nobody attends an award ceremony on account of the *laudator*; that is, for the person giving the speech in honour of the award recipient. It would be impertinent of me to delude myself in this regard. A *laudator* is an officially appointed tormentor, a burglar of time, a speaker the audience barely takes notice of and, if they do, only because he or she is a figure in the overall ceremony, like a conductor on a train. In other words, no matter who this year's recipient might have been, you would certainly not have made your way here because of me. And today, in particular, you most definitely did not come to listen to me talk, here, under these exceptional circumstances, in the presence of Salman Rushdie. In case you're still wondering, he is, in fact, here. He made the long journey to our shores and is sitting among us. Still, I must beg your patience a few minutes longer. I promise to keep it brief, although it is not an easy task, as there is – and this will come as a surprise to absolutely no one – quite a bit to say about this year's recipient.

»I actually seem to have a mild version of the thing«, wrote Salman in a text message to me on 18 March 2020. »Fever up and down for three days. No cause for alarm«.

Of course, there was »cause for alarm«. When it was over, Salman wrote about it in an essay: his fever had been extremely high, it had been difficult to breathe and the already overwhelmed New York City hospitals had not been in a position to be of any help. And yet there was no trace of alarm in the text messages he sent me during the two agonising weeks of his Covid illness, in which he was cared for by Eliza, herself also seriously ill at the time. Those two weeks were, no doubt, filled with fear, worry and uncertainty, and yet his messages sounded entirely calm, curious and almost cheerful:

»Only thing is to hunker down and tough it out«, he wrote, and »On the roller coaster, temperature normal at night but up again in the morning«, and then, once again, »Just riding it out«.

Why do I draw attention to these details of his private experience? Because I'm convinced they tell us quite a bit about Salman. Less than two weeks before those messages, the world had been completely normal. Then, suddenly – at a moment in which the rest of us still had no inkling as to the severity of the situation – he was already being affected on a deep and personal level by the very thing that was about to descend upon us all. Of course, Salman encountered a *version of the thing* almost immediately and, of course, he would go on to endure the crisis with exemplary poise, without ever losing – at least not outwardly – his sense of humour for even a second.

Salman Rushdie is the very opposite of a recluse, a person detached from the world. In fact, this is what distinguishes him as a human being and, in particular, as a writer. He will always see, well before the rest of us, whatever is brewing in the froth of the world spirit. And, much like radio waves reach a receiver tuned to the right frequency, a *version of the thing* will inevitably find its way to him. Saleem Sinai, the narrator of »Midnight's Children«, one of the most important novels of the last century, is born at the exact second of partition – the separation of the countries of India and Pakistan – and is at once blessed and cursed with the telepathic power to read people's minds. From then on, nothing goes on in these two newly created and newly separated countries without him knowing about it. The character of Saleem is not only a portrait of the artist as a young man taken to the level of the magical; it is also, in a very special sense, the portrait of an

author for whom no new development, no intellectual current ever goes unnoticed. To put it succinctly, Salman Rushdie's novels are about everything. That is to say they are about the colourful, fiery, crazy, confused, violent chaos that is our world. On the one hand, there is no doubt that he is a highly erudite individual, and every halfway-informed reader will know, for example, that he wrote a playfully post-modern fantasy about Cervantes' »Don Quixote« and that his most recent novel, »Victory City«, is such a cunning, original and erudite reimagining of the rise and fall of the medieval Bisnaga Empire that expert historians must look upon it in awe. On the other hand, however, just to round out this image of erudition, it is important to note that Salman is also the author of the following text message: »Obi Wan leaves Vader alive AGAIN? And the whole Third Sister storyline ... just nonsense. No sense at all.«

Indeed, after my son and I watched the new Star Wars series »Obi Wan Kenobi« and found ourselves confronted with the dramaturgical idiocy of this miserable show, there was only one person in our entire circle of friends who had already seen it and with whom we could exchange views from one continent to the other. The same thing occurred after Amazon released »The Rings of Power«, the most expensive television series ever made. In this case, however, the product was so bad that even Salman threw in the towel after a while: »The Tolkien thingy is disgracefully bad. I've tried and given up«, he wrote. It should be noted here that the series came out in September 2022, that is, only a few weeks after the horrifying attempt on his life, and that the text message quoted above was sent on 3 October of that year.

In other words, when something important happens out there in the world, Salman will detect its presence before the rest of us and transform it – sometimes in obvious ways, sometimes in a manner only he understands – into art. If a virus emerges against which no one yet has any immunity, Salman will encounter it before us, much like he depicted, in a

work appropriately titled »Fury«, how an indefinable shadow, a vague fear, a rage without a name descended upon the island of Manhattan before the events of September 11th; much like he wrote »The Golden House« – a book that features a repulsive laughing stock of a character eventually voted into the highest office – at a time when liberal America was still chuckling condescendingly at the prospect of a Trump presidency; and, of course, much like he was the first to encounter that spiritual virus that unfolded its global political impact at the end of the 1980s and later received the name Islamic Fundamentalism, which would cause him to become both an iconic figure in global efforts to defend artistic freedom and what Hegel would have called a world historical individual.

It is indeed possible for writers to be prophets, but when they are, it is often in a more private way than they would have liked. Would it have been possible, in September 1988, for the author Salman Rushdie to have imagined that his recently published book, a playful examination of the *condition humaine* in a time of emigration flows, would blow up in a manner similar to the airplane out of which his two heroes, Gibreel and Saladin, are catapulted into the ether, only to fall into the sea, survive – miraculously – and find themselves transformed into ... well, into what? Into larger-than-life beings, into an angel and a devil, into characters onto which others project their own ideas, into figures that are by turns worshipped, hated, idolized and feared? Is it not superbly uncanny how the author of this novel about two surreally transformed characters was himself subjected to the most surreal transformation in the public consciousness following the absurd reaction to that very same novel? Is it not eerie that for some, he became an actual Satan, while for others he was transformed into a heroic activist campaigning on behalf of free speech and artistic expression, into the most famous writer in the world, into a superhumanly large symbolic figure?

It is breathtaking how Salman Rushdie navigated the situation – one that would have easily crushed a less robust individual. Thankfully, most of us will probably never find out how we might behave in such extreme circumstances. Salman found out, however, and I can think of very few individuals who could have passed the test as well as he did. In »Joseph Anton«, which is surely his most fantastical book even though it contains not a single made-up line, we read about how much calm, cool prudence and tactical intelligence was needed to become – much like Gibreel at the end of »The Satanic Verses« – a human being again.

There is nothing to sugar-coat here. Although it is true that everyone was outraged by the fatwa issued by the ayatollah, Western governments nevertheless made it quite clear they were not going to let the incident spoil their business relations. The expectation was that Salman Rushdie, in return for the personal protection he had been granted, would retreat to his hiding place and keep quiet. This was not only the wish of Mrs. Thatcher, who had a degree of influence in the matter; I vividly remember it also being the wish of my long since passed Great Uncle Fritz, an educated man, albeit educated in that very German way that prompted him, after making one of his often listless jokes, to exclaim »Just kidding!« and »No harm in telling a joke every once in a while!«. In 1989, this same Great Uncle Fritz, who loved to travel and thus considered himself a *connoisseur* of the world, explained to my fourteen year-old self: »This man, Rushdie, he's famous for doing this, they say so in the newspaper. He wants to provoke a reaction!« Of course, Uncle Fritz would never have wished death upon Salman, but at the same time, he found the whole affair – including the obviously very naughty book, which, of course, he never read – somehow unclean, sordid and far beneath his dignity. A similar approach was taken on 10 March 1989 by the panellists on the German TV show »Das Literarische Quartett« (The Literary Quartet), who intentionally refrained from discussing the novel. Panellist Marcel Reich-Ranicki chose not to critique the book, preferring

instead to quote a German publisher who was refusing to publish the work by claiming not to know it and thus being unsure as to whether it had any literary value. After that, panellist Jürgen Busche referred to the scandal as a political affair, arguing that a literary talk show was simply not the proper venue in which to discuss the matter. In response to this, allow me to suggest that perhaps one way to find out that the book not only has significant literary value, but that it is, in fact, a masterpiece, would be to, oh I don't know ... actually read it?

Actually reading the book, however, was precisely what very few people wanted to do at the time. Instead, what they wanted most of all was to avoid any interruptions in their trade relations with Iran, much in the same way some people today – and I do not find the comparison exaggerated – are urging Ukraine, a country invaded by a foreign aggressor, to somehow see it in their hearts to stop being so stubborn, cede some territory and refrain from testing the patience of the rest of the world which, for its part, has demonstrated such benevolence so far. In precisely the same manner, Salman Rushdie was expected to remain silent, show some humility and just play along. And, yes, it is relevant that this man – the one so disturbing the peace by being treated with so much injustice – was not from London or Oxford, but indeed from a subcontinent which average European citizens still tended to imagine as a chaotic, far-away land. Ian McEwan put it best when he observed that England would have probably reacted quite differently to the fatwa had it been issued, say, against Dame Iris Murdoch. But Salman did not play along. He remained visible, present and above all a writer. He fought back, became transformed into a world historical individual and engaged in a seemingly hopeless battle to return to what he actually was, an artist, a humorist, a moulder of sentences. The novels »Haroun and the Sea of Stories« and »The Moor's Last Sigh«, both written in a series of different hideouts, are cathartic acts of inner liberation. When we read these books, it is difficult to imagine that the person who wrote them was also the most famous invisible man

in the world, hurrying from one hiding place to the next, fully isolated and yet lit up by the harshest of spotlights. We have Salman Rushdie's personal security guards to thank for protecting his life all those years; but we must also thank the author's own unimaginably resilient artistry for steering him clear of the two key dangers that naturally threaten creative people in situations of extreme peril: the degradation of the soul and the desiccation of the mind.

If Salman himself were a literary character, there is only one author who could have invented him. In his books, we come upon an ever-evolving narrative device that one might describe as a literary appropriation of the superhero motif. Time and again, one character or another acquires supernatural powers that – at a cursory glance – could just as easily have come from a Marvel film; however, at the very instant in which the reader settles in for what might appear to be a work of colourful, comic-strip slickness, the optics shift and the character takes on their true humanity. We find Saladin Chamcha, for example, only seconds previously a satanic faun, suddenly sitting at the bedside of his dying father; we find the deified Pampa Kampana utterly helpless and forced to watch as her daughters and granddaughters age before her eyes; and we find Brother, the author behind the fictional work »Quichotte«, torn from his auctorial, god-like power over his creation by the severe illness of his sister. Salman

Rushdie's use of fantasy is never a form of escapism. Instead, it is the means by which he shows us, as if under a strong magnifying glass, our nature as human beings in all our richness, grandness, weakness, obsolescence and vulnerability. In this spirit, that is, considering the absurdly large story of his life, I shall take the liberty of describing Salman as an archetypal character in a Rushdie novel. He is one of the great storytellers in the history of literature and perhaps the most important defender of the freedom of speech and artistic expression in our time. But above all else, he is a wise, curious, cheerful and kind human being. As such, he is a most worthy recipient of this award, a peace prize that expressly acknowledges not only a person's artistic achievement but also their exceptional humanity. And now, here it is, finally, the moment you've been waiting for, the moment in which I cede the floor to him.

Dear Salman, grandmaster, great friend, thank you for all the magic and congratulations from all my heart!

*Translated into English by The Hagedorn Group
and Daniel Kehlmann.*

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Salman Rushdie

»If Peace was a Prize«

Acceptance speech

Thank you all for being here today - Lord Mayor Mike Josef (what wonderful introductory words), Robert Habeck and his colleagues from the government and the parliaments, and of course all of you who have come from near and far so I can stand here before you. I am immensely grateful for this great prize, which I have known of and respected for a long time without ever thinking it might come in my direction, and whose list of previous winners - some of whom are here today - is without compare. My deepest thanks to the members of the Peace Prize jury under the chairpersonship of Karin Schmidt-Friderichs. My thanks also to Daniel, Daniel Kehlmann, whom I admire so much as a writer. I'm so happy that he interrupted his own book publication schedule and made time to be here today to deliver his beautiful Laudation. I also want to pay my respects to the building in which we are gathered, which is a symbol of freedom. It's a privilege to be asked to speak within these walls.

And now, to begin with, let me tell you a story. There were once two jackals, Karataka, whose name meant ›Cautious‹, and Damanaka, whose name meant ›Daring‹. They were in the second rank of the retinue of the lion king Pingalaka, but they were ambitious and cunning. One day the lion king was frightened by a roaring noise in the forest which the jackals knew was the voice of a runaway bull, nothing for a lion to be scared of. They visited the bull and persuaded him to come before the lion and declare his friendship. The bull was pretty scared of the lion, but he agreed, and so the lion king and the bull became friends, and the jackals were promoted to the first rank by the grateful monarch. Unfortunately, the lion and the bull began to spend so much time lost in conversation that the lion stopped hunting and so the animals in the retinue were starving. So the jackals

persuaded the king that the bull was plotting against him, and they persuaded the bull that the lion was planning to kill him, and so the lion and the bull fought, and the bull was killed, and there was plenty of meat for everyone to eat, and the jackals rose even higher in the king's regard because they had warned him of the plot, and they rose in the regard of everyone else in the forest, except, of course, for the poor bull, but he was dead, so it didn't matter, and he was providing everyone with an excellent lunch.

This, very approximately, is the frame-story of the first and longest of the five parts of the book of animal fables known as the »Panchatantra«, titled »On Causing Dissension Among Friends«. The third part, »War and Peace«, a title later used by another well-known book, describes a conflict between the crows and the owls, in which a treacherous crow's deceitfulness leads to the defeat and destruction of the owls. I used a version of this story in my novel »Victory City«.

What I have always found fascinating - or actually attractive - about the Panchatantra stories is that many of them do not moralize. They do not preach goodness or virtue or modesty or honesty or restraint. Cunning and strategy and amorality often overcome all opposition. The good guys don't always win. (It's not even always clear who the good guys are.) For this reason they seem, to the modern reader, uncannily contemporary, because we, the modern readers, live in a world of amorality and shamelessness and treachery and cunning, in which bad guys everywhere have often won.

»Where do stories come from?« the boy Haroun asks his storyteller father in my novel »Haroun and the Sea of Stories« and the most important part of the answer is, they come from other stories, from the

ocean of stories upon which we are all sailing. That's not the only point of origin, it should be said. There's also, of course, the storyteller's own experience and opinion of life, and there are also the times he lives in; but most stories have some sort of roots in other stories, maybe in many stories, which combine, conjoin, and change, and so become new stories. This is the process that we call imagination.

I have always been inspired by mythologies, folktales and fairytales, not because they contain miracles - talking animals, magic fishes - but because they encapsulate truth. For example, the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, which was an important inspiration for my novel »The Ground beneath her Feet«, can be told in fewer than one hundred words, and yet it contains, in compressed form, mighty questions about the relationship between art, love, and death. It asks: can love, with the help of art, overcome death? But perhaps it answers: doesn't death, in spite of art, overcome love? Or else it tells us that art takes on the subjects of love and death and transcends both by turning them into immortal stories. Those hundred words contain enough profundity to inspire a thousand novels.

The storehouse of myth is rich indeed. The Greeks, of course, but also the Norse Prose and Poetic Edda. Aesop, Homer, the »Ring of the Nibelungs«, the Celtic legends, and the three great Matters of Europe: the Matter of France, the body of stories around the figure of Charlemagne, the Matter of Rome, regarding that empire, and the Matter of Britain, the legends surrounding the figure of King Arthur. Here in Germany you have the folktales collected by Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm. However in India, before I heard those stories, I grew up with the »Panchatantra«, and when I find myself, as I do at this moment, in between writing projects, it is to these crafty, devious jackals and crows and their like that I return, to ask them what story I should tell next. So far, they have never let me down. Everything I need to know about goodness and its opposite, and about liberty and captivity, and about conflict, can be found in these

stories. For love, I have to say, it is necessary to look elsewhere.

And here I stand today to receive a peace prize and so I ask myself, what does the world of fable have to tell us about peace?

The news is not very good. Homer tells us that peace comes after a decade of war when everyone we care about is dead and Troy has been destroyed. The Norse myths tell us that peace comes after the »Ragnarøk«, the Twilight of the Gods, when the gods destroy their traditional foes but are also destroyed by them. The German word for this event, »Götterdämmerung«, is much more exact than the English »Twilight«. The Mahabharata and Ramayana, too, tell us that peace comes at a bloody price. And the Panchatantra tells us that peace - the death of the owls and the victory of the crows - is only achieved through an act of treachery. And to abandon the legends of the past for a moment to look at this summer's twin legends - I'm referring of course to the movie double-header known as »Barbenheimer« - the film »Oppenheimer« reminds us that peace only came after two atom bombs, Little Boy and Fat Man, were dropped on the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; while the box-office monster called »Barbie« makes clear that unbroken peace and undiluted happiness, in a world where every day is perfect and every night is girls' night, only exist in pink plastic.

And here we are gathered to speak of peace when war is raging not very far away, a war born of one man's tyranny and greed for power and conquest, a sad narrative that will not be unfamiliar to a German audience; and another bitter conflict has exploded in Israel and the Gaza Strip. Peace, right now, feels like a fantasy born of a narcotic smoked in a pipe. Even the meaning of the word is a thing on which the combatants cannot agree. Peace, for Ukraine, means more than a cessation of hostilities. It means, as it must mean, a restoration of seized territory and a guarantee of its sovereignty. Peace, for Ukraine's enemy, means a Ukrainian surrender, and a recognition that territories lost are lost. The same word, with

two incompatible definitions. Peace, for Israel and the Palestinians, feels even further away.

Peace is a hard thing to make, and a hard thing to find.

And yet we yearn for it, do we not, not only the great peace that comes at the end of war, but also the little peace of our private lives, to feel ourselves at peace with our lives, and with the little world around us. Walt Whitman thought of peace as the sun that shines down upon us all every day:

O sun of real peace! O hastening light!

O free and extatic! O what I here, preparing, warble for!

O the sun of the world will ascend, dazzling, and take his height -

and you too, O my Ideal, will surely ascend!

Whitman's ›ideal‹ was peace. So let us agree with him, gathered here in this beautiful place, that hard as it is to find, impossible as it may feel to sustain, this thing which is so hard to define is, in spite of everything, one of our great values, a thing ardently to pursue.

My parents thought so when they named me ›Salman‹, a name whose root is the noun ›salamat‹, meaning peace. So ›Salman‹ is ›peaceful‹. And as a matter of fact, I was an extremely quiet, well-behaved, studious boy, peaceful by name, peaceful by nature. The trouble began later. But I've always thought of myself in that way. Even if my adult life has had other ideas.

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If my work has been influenced by fables, there is also something decidedly fabulist about a peace prize. I like the idea that peace itself might in fact be the prize, that this jury has something magical, even fantastical, about it - a jury of wise benefactors so infinitely powerful that, once a year and no more,

they are able to bestow upon a single individual, and no more, one year's award of peace. Peace itself, true, blessed, perfect peace, not trivial contentment, not *paix ordinaire* but a fine vintage of *Pax Frankfuriana*, a whole year's supply of it, delivered to your door, elegantly bottled. That's an award I'd be very happy to receive. I am even thinking of writing a story about it, ›The Man Who Received Peace as a Prize‹.

I imagine it taking place in a small country town, at the village fair, maybe. There are the usual competitions, for the best pies and cakes, the best watermelons, the best vegetables; for guessing the weight of the farmer's pig; for beauty, for song, and for dancing. A pedlar in a threadbare frock-coat arrives in a gaily painted horse-drawn wagon, looking a little like the itinerant confidence trickster Professor Marvel in ›The Wizard of Oz‹, and says that if he is allowed to judge the contests he will hand out the best rewards anyone has ever seen. ›Best prizes!‹ he cries. ›Roll up! Roll up!‹ And so they do roll up, the simple country folk, and the pedlar hands out small bottles to the various prizewinners, bottles labeled ›Truth‹, ›Beauty‹, ›Freedom‹, ›Goodness‹, and ›Peace‹. The villagers are disappointed. They would have preferred cash. And in the year following the fair, there are strange occurrences. After drinking the liquid in his bottle, the winner of the Truth prize begins to annoy and alienate his fellow villagers by telling them exactly what he really thinks of them. The Beauty, after drinking her award, becomes more beautiful, at least in her own opinion, but also insufferably vain. Freedom's licentious behavior shocks many of her fellow villagers, who conclude that her bottle must have contained some powerful intoxicant. Goodness declares himself to be a saint and of course after that everyone finds him unbearable. And Peace just sits under a tree and smiles. As the village is so full of troubles, this smile is extremely irritating, as well. A year later when the fair is held again, the pedlar returns, but is driven out of town. ›Go away‹, the villagers cry. ›We don't want those sorts of prizes. A rosette, a cheese, a piece of ham, a red ribbon with a

shiny medal hanging from it – these are normal prizes. We want those instead.»

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I may or may not write that story. At the very least it may serve lightheartedly to illustrate a serious point, which is that concepts which we think we can all agree to be virtues can come across as vices, depending on your point of view, and on their effects in the real world. In Italo Calvino's book »The Cloven Viscount«, »Il Visconte Dimezzato«, the hero is vertically bisected by a cannon ball during a battle. Both halves survive, their wounds sewn together by an expert doctor, and after that it turns out that the cloven viscount, has been bisected morally as well as physically; one of the two halves is now impossibly good, while the other has become impossibly evil. However, it turns out that both halves do an equal amount of damage in the world, and are equally dreadful to deal with, until they are sewn back together by the same expert doctor, and become, once again, physically singular but morally plural, which is to say, human.

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My fate, over the past many years, has been to drink from the bottle marked Freedom, and therefore to write without any restraint those books which came to my mind to write, and now, as I am on the verge of publishing my twenty-second volume, I have to say that on twenty-one of those twenty-two occasions the elixir has been well worth drinking, and it has given me a good life doing the only work I ever wanted to do. On the remaining occasion, namely the publication of my fourth novel, I learned – many of us learned – that freedom can create an equal and opposite reaction from the forces of unfreedom, and I learned, too, how to face the consequences of that reaction, and to continue, as best I could, to be the unfettered artist I had always wanted to be. I learned, too, that many other writers and artists, exercising their freedom, also faced the forces of unfreedom, and that, in short, freedom can be a dangerous wine to drink. But that made it more necessary, more essential, more important to defend, and I have done

my best, along with a host of others, to defend it. I confess there have been times when I'd rather have drunk the Peace elixir and spent my life sitting under a tree wearing a blissful smile, but that was not the bottle the pedlar handed me.

We live in a time I did not think I would see in my lifetime, a time when freedom – and in particular, freedom of expression, without which the world of books would not exist – is everywhere under attack from reactionary, authoritarian, populist, demagogic, half-educated, narcissistic, careless voices; when places of education and libraries are subject to hostility and censorship; and when extremist religion and bigoted ideologies have begun to intrude in areas of life in which they do not belong. And there are also progressive voices being raised in favor of a new kind of bien-pensant censorship, one which appears virtuous, and which many people, especially young people, have begun to see as a virtue. So freedom is under pressure from the left as well as the right, the young as well as the old. This is something new, and made more complicated by our new tools of communication, the internet, on which well-designed pages of malevolent lies sit side by side with the truth and it is difficult for many people to tell which is which; and our social media, where the idea of freedom is every day abused to permit, very often, a kind of online mob rule, which the billionaire owners of these platforms seem increasingly willing to encourage, and to profit by.

What do we do about free speech when it is so widely abused? The answer is that we should still do, with renewed vigor, what we have always needed to do: to answer bad speech with better speech, to counter false narratives with better narratives, to answer hate with love, and to believe that the truth can still succeed even in an age of lies. We must defend it fiercely, and define it as broadly as possible, so yes, we should of course defend speech which offends us, otherwise we are not defending free expression at all. Publishers are amongst the most important guardians of freedom. Thank you for doing your job, and please do it even better and more bravely, and

let a thousand and one voices speak in a thousand and one different ways.

To quote the poet Cavafy, »the barbarians are coming today«, and what I do know is that the answer to philistinism is art, the answer to barbarianism is civilization, and in a culture war – such as we are in – it may be that artists of all sorts – filmmakers, actors, singers, yes, and practitioners of the art the world’s book people gather in Frankfurt each year to promote and to celebrate, the ancient art of the book – can still, together, turn the barbarians away from the gates.

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Before I conclude these remarks, I would like to thank all those in Germany and beyond who raised their voices in solidarity and friendship after the attack on me some fourteen months ago. That support

meant a great deal to me personally, and to my family, and it showed us how passionate and how widespread the belief in free speech still is, all over the world. The outrage that was expressed after the August 12th attack was in sympathy with me, but it was also, more importantly, born of people’s horror – your horror – that the core value of a free society had been so viciously and ignorantly assaulted. I am most grateful for the flood of friendship that came my way, and will do my best to continue to fight for what you all rose up to defend.

However, as I’m going home with this peace prize, I will also take the time to drink the elixir, and sit peacefully under a tree wearing a blissful, beatific smile. Thank you all.

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