



The Rushdie Letters: Freedom to Speak, Freedom to Write (Stages)

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In February 1989 Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini of Iran announced that Salman Rushdie, author of *The Satanic Verses*, and "all involved in its publication who were aware of its content, are sentenced to death." Anyone who died in the cause of killing Rushdie, he said, would be "regarded as a martyr and go directly to heaven."

The death sentence—or fatwa—quickly drew blood. Bookshops in London, Oslo, and Sydney were firebombed. Five people were killed and a hundred wounded when demonstrators attacked the U. S. embassy in Islamabad. In Bombay, twelve rioters were shot dead. The Italian translator of *The Satanic Verses* was stabbed viciously and the Japanese translator was stabbed to death. In Berkeley, bombs were thrown in Cody's Bookstore and Waldenbooks. Fifth Avenue in New York was sealed off after a bookshop received a bomb threat.

In *The Rushdie Letters* twenty-six internationally renowned authors respond to the most extreme example of censorship in modern times. Also included is Rushdie's reply to their letters, his essay on exile, "One Thousand Days in a Balloon," and a chronology of the fatwa.



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