

Monday 26 August 2019

**“If that person can be the President of the United States
then anything can happen,” - Salman Rushdie**

In a sold out event at the Edinburgh International Book Festival, Salman Rushdie talked about his latest novel *Quichotte*, a modern retelling of Don Quixote set in the USA. Chair and radio journalist James Naughtie asked the renowned author about the presence - or lack of - of President Trump in the book.

“I didn’t want him in my fucking book.” Said Rushdie. “He’s in all our daily lives every day. If that person can be the President of the United States then anything can happen.”

The author of *Midnight’s Children* and *The Satanic Verses* spoke about racism in America, which emerges in his tale of Indian-Americans travelling across the country. “Sometimes nations have original sin. The original sin of America is twofold. One is the eradication of the original population and the other is slavery, the consequence of which is racism. That act has shaped American history and has never really been apologised for, there’s never been any reparations.

“Many of us thought [redemption] had begun with the election of a black President and in fact what happened was the opposite. That the presence of a black man in the White House so much outraged a section of white America as to give it extra energy, a kind energy that it had not had before. Whether that’s permanent or temporary I don’t know. I’m actually more optimistic about the situation in America than about the situation in the two other countries that I care about, India and this one. It’s possible to see a reversal there. Unfortunately, the Democrats have an enormous gift for losing elections.”

“I think [Warren] might have best chance of beating him. Because she’s been very interesting in how she’s fought this so far. She’s not done any kind personal attacks, she’s concentrated entirely on policy issues. Maybe what we need is an opposite to Trump and the closest I think we have to an opposite of Trump is Warren. I think it might be Warren, I think she has a strong chance of being the candidate.”

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Rushdie continued to speak of the rise of right wing governments and nationalism across the world, especially in the UK and India. “I worry much more for the irreversibility of the decision this country is about to make.” He said. “There is this dream of England that has been foisted on people of this perfect time when there wasn’t any inconvenient brown people around and everything was good... exactly when was that? Are you unaware that the pleasant life of that country was based on rape, pillage and exploitation of a quarter of the world?”

“I worry even more about what’s happening in India where the rise of Hindu nationalism is a tidal wave of popularity, and the government there is there for as long as it wants to be and seems to be unleashed as a result. And the things that are happening in that country are really very tragic.”

Rushdie’s novels often contain humour, even in dark settings. “Comedy allows you to go deeper, and also to go deeper into people’s consciousness.” He argued. “Because if you’ve laughed at something to a certain extent you’ve received it. I’m not good at serious writing, I get bored with it. I have a very low boredom threshold and I don’t want to bore myself.”