

Gomorra's Author to Leave Italy?

E.M. (October 16, 2008)



Roberto Saviano is now considering leaving Italy to reclaim his life. "I'm still only 28, I want to write. [...] I felt the moral obligation to become a symbol...but now I want to rebuild my life, far from the shadows"



This week marks the second year of Roberto Saviano's heavily guarded life, a day-to-day accompaniment by vigilant security detail. It's not an anniversary the author and journalist relishes. Ever since the staggering success of his book, *Gomorra*, in which he exposed the activities of a Camorra cartel, he has been under constant threat of reprisals from the criminal organization. His work has become an international best-seller, his celebrity has risen, perhaps to the status of national hero, but the past few days have been a watershed moment, as Saviano has received more ominous warnings and has publicly bemoaned an existence of constantly looking over his shoulder.

In a television appearance on the Italian show "Fahrenheit", he described some of the difficulties that naturally arise for a man in his situation—"you're always under suspicion, in solitude, while the people around you disappear"—and yet he appeared resigned. He added he passes a lot of his time at the gym, boxing and palling around with the carabinieri policemen who have become his permanent escorts.

Despite the heavy restrictions imposed on his personal life (he has said he would like to be able to visit his mother without her fearing for his life) and freedom of movement, up until now Saviano has resolved to stay in Italy. But a new, more serious call has been made to purge the author. An informant from the Casalesi clan, the protagonists of his exposé, has revealed that the clan's fugitive leader is seeking a bomb detonator, similar to the one that was used to kill anti-mafia judge Giovanni Falcone in 1992, to do away with Saviano, reportedly "by Christmas".

The alarm this announcement has elicited has caused the security around Saviano to tighten, and for the media and public figures, especially from the Democratic Left (the PD Party), to rally around the author. The informant has since rescinded his statement, but investigations into the claim are still being made.

Saviano has responded that he is now considering leaving Italy to reclaim his life: "F**k, I'm still only 28, I want to write. [...] I felt the moral obligation to become a symbol...but now I want to rebuild my life, far from the shadows".

Salman Rushdie, the author of "The Satanic Verses" who lived in hiding for nearly a decade pursuant to a fatwah from Ayatollah Khomeini, supports Saviano's decision to leave Italy, but says he has to "carefully choose a foreign haven".

The question remains: amid cries that the author should stay in Italy as a symbol of courage, of hope against powerful Mafia factions, how long can Saviano hold off?



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