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VOICES OF THE «DREAM - VILAYET» THE IMAGE OF LONDON IN *THE SATANIC VERSES*

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The image of London in *The Satanic Verses* varies between fanatic adoration and bitter blasphemy, emotions that originate either in the prejudices of the participants to the discourse of the ‘polis’, or in the revelations related to its reality: Saladin Chamcha –from unquestionable repudiation of his Indian past, through blind copying of Englishness, to an aware identitary revalorization–, Gibreel Farishta –perception of London as a doomed, apocalyptic city–, the exiled Imam –London as no man’s land–, Hind Sufyan –London as divine punishment–, Hal Valance and Sisodia –London as business to profit on. Other voices, Changez Chamchawala, Pamela Lovelace, Zeeny Vakil, contribute to the overall negative, sometimes realistic, perspective on the British metropolis as impacting the destinies of the migrants. The image of post-imperial London appears extensively in the literature generated by the Indian diaspora, being «a symbolic site of struggle and conquest» and «an object of desire and the idealizing imagination» (Ball, 1998: 67).

1

Saladin Chamcha's London (re)transformation

1.1. From Salahuddin Chamchawala to Saladin Chamcha: O, pounds, o, sensibility! Salahuddin Chamchawala's first contact with England is by means of a wallet full of pounds that he finds in the street close to Scandal Point, his home: «pounds! Pounds sterling, from Proper London in the fabled country of Vilayet across the black water and far away»¹ (35). Not very much later, genuine London for the thirteen-year-old Salahuddin translates as archetypal London, the city of the common attraction points for any visitor or immigrant –«Proper London itself, Bigben Nelsonscolumn Lordstavern Bloodytower Queen. (...) Saintspauls, Puddinglane, Threadneedlestreet» (38-39)– plus some «moral values»: «the dream – Vilayet of poise and moderation» (37).

Salahuddin's first trip to London, «the brave new world», is associated with the «interplanetary migrations», similar to those in Asimov's *Foundation* or Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles*. Once in England where he will benefit a proper education, Salahuddin has to deny his Indian identity and the first step in achieving this is the symbolic rejection of his father and of all the values he symbolizes; he declares his secularity, «living without a god of any type», as the necessary premise for becoming «a good and proper English man» (43).

Salahuddin's unconditioned surrender to idealized England/London proves successful due to his adopting and adapting policy: five years later, Salahuddin becomes Saladin, «after the fashion of the English school» (45), while, by graduation time, he has already received his British passport, wishing to continue his English experience as an actor.

Saladin Chamcha constructs his English identity starting from mimicking the typical English facial expression to adopting the English perspective upon the world. «This face was handsome in a somewhat sour, patrician fashion, with long, thick, downturned lips like those of a disgusted turbot, and thin

¹ All quotes from Salman Rushdie (2006).

eyebrows arching sharply over eyes that watched the world with a kind of alert contempt» (33). Within the same adapting process, learning the modulations of the foreign voice enriches his new identity. As Moslund states, «Saladin Chamcha succeeds in inscribing himself within the new time and space, yet not as an individual, as authenticity, but as an excellent adaptable» (Moslund, 2006: 295).

For the actor of the thousand voices, London represents «the real world» he returns to after India's first attempt to recuperate him: «He was a neat man in a buttoned suit heading for London and an ordered, contended life. He was a member of the real world» (74). «Elloven Deeowen» (London) circumscribes the values that Saladin believes in as having been adopted as his own: «I am a man to whom certain things are of importance: rigour, self-discipline, reason, the pursuit of what is noble without recourse to that old crutch –God. The ideal of beauty, the possibility of exaltation, the mind» (135) England is the «moderate and common-sensical land» (158) whose «first class» (164) Citizen he was, also «a member of Actors' Equity, the Automobile Association and the Garrick Club» (163).

Assuming the label *Civis Britannicus sum*, Saladin Chamcha makes the apology of London as an «islet of sensibility, surrounded by the cool sense of the sea» (398), telling his/its love story. His initial attitude was one of prostration, followed by the desire of identification with it, annihilating his previous existence. London means hospitality –«We Londoners can be proud of our hospitality» (398)–, having a long tradition of an authentic refuge for those attracted by its splendor –London cannot be identified with «the new regulations that controlled immigration» or with the catastrophic experience while he was a monster.

Of material things, he had given his love to this city, London, preferring it to the city of his birth or to any other, had been creeping up to it, stealthily, with mounting excitement, freezing into a statue when it looked in his direction, dreaming of being the

one to possess it and so, in a sense, become it (398)

For Saladin, London is «O Proper London!», the past and the present which he adopts and which is believed to circumscribe his future; imagined London is the equivalent of «culture, city, wife; and a fourth and final love, of which he had spoken to nobody: the love of a dream [having a baby]» (400).

1.2. Saladin back to Salahuddin – the sharp kick of reality. After the explosion of *Bostan*, the plane, on his return from India and his landing on the British land, Saladin turns into a goat-resembling devilish creature, his minutely composed English appearance cracking to let go of an «Animal (...) You're all the same. Can't expect animals to observe civilized standards. (...) you little fuck» (158) England, the «cool Vilayet» (37), becomes a «universe of fear» (158) whose only entities are three immigration officers and five policemen. In the police van where he is boxed up under the suspicion of being an illegal immigrant or at least a serious social danger, Saladin experiences his first contact with real England –«he felt a sharp kick land on his ribs, painful and realistic enough» (158)– and realizes that he is perceived in the same way as the «riff-raff from villages in Sylhet or the bicycle-repair shops of Gujranwala» (159) and not at all according to his minutely constructed English identity. (Looking like Shaitan would have contradicted any English looks one way or another!)

The humiliation experienced by the still gullible Saladin is later sentimentally theorized into a self-oriented lamentation: if he obeyed and assumed all that England stands for, «then how cruel these fates were to instigate his rejection by the very world he had so determinedly courted; how desolating, to be cast from the gates of the city one believed oneself to have taken long ago! –what mean small-mindedness was this, to cast him back into the bosom of his people, from whom he'd felt so distant for so long!» (254).

After the disaster produced at the Hot Wax nightclub, where, because of him, everything was set on fire, Saladin, coming back to his human appearance, declares: «I'll come back to life» (400).

The real London forces him into explaining the abstract notions from his

previous sterile discourse:

Easier said than done; it was life, after all, that had rewarded his love of a dream-child with childlessness; his love of a woman, with her estrangement from him and her insemination by his old college friend; his love of a city, by hurling him down towards it from Himalayan heights; and his love of a civilization, by having him bedeviled, humiliated, broken upon its wheel (401)

Returning to India since hearing about his father's imminent death –but not because of this–, Saladin approaches his much despised past differently, revalorizing what he, as a child, blindly rejected as being necessarily bad. From this new perspective, «His old English life, its bizzareries, its evils, now seemed very remote, even irrelevant, like his truncated stage-name» (534). What has happened is not a reversal of roles –England: bad, India: good– but Saladin's understanding and valuing of the two realities and, most importantly, of his relating to them (Saladin's evolution from fanaticism to humanism is the topic of a different article).

2

What the others say: reactions to Saladin Chamcha's identity London adaptation

2.1. Changez Chamchawala: What is daddy saying? – «A freak, an actor!» Five years after Salahuddin's transformation into Saladin of the Velayeti, for Changez Chamchawala, the father, England, by means of his son's London life, means his son's showing «contempt for his own kind» (45) as well as his son's transformation into «a fauntleroy, a grand panjandrum, (...) a freak» (45). Once hearing of Saladin's carrier choice, that of being an actor, Changez translates it according to Indian standards: «a confounded gigolo», «a ghoul, a hoosh (...). An actor!» (48), labeling it as devil's work, betrayal of his family's values and of his country's heritage. What for Saladin means a modality of conquering the hearts of the people he wants to belong to, a quick way of being one of «people-like-us» by mimicking them unconditionally, for Changez his son's job in London means «spend[ing] your life jiggling and preening under bright lights, kissing blonde women under the gaze of strangers who have paid to watch your shame» (47). Saladin's English transformation equals with the interruption of the Indian family line and tradition, the annihilation of Changez's posterity: «He has made himself into an imitator of non-existing men. I have nobody to follow me, to give what I have made. This is his revenge: he steals from me my posterity» (71).

2.2. Pamela Chamcha, née Lovelace – London, Down the hatch! If, for Saladin Chamcha, the projected and idealized image of England is also the only reality he accepts as plausible and possible, his wife, Pamela, discriminates between fantasy, Saladin's one, and what England really stands for. Talking to Jumpy Joshy, her husband's former colleague and her present lover, Pamela accuses Saladin of his touristic approach to England: «Him and his Royal Family, you wouldn't believe. Cricket, the Houses of Parliament, the Queen. The

place never stopped being a picture postcard to him. You couldn't get him to look at what was really real» (175).

More than that, Pamela herself, despite being his wife, is part of the same clichéistic approach, Saladin's perception of her being a typological, never a particular one: «I was bloody Britannia. Warm beer, mince pies, common-sense and me. But I'm really real, too, Jumpy Joshy; I really really am» (175). Pamela complains about being perceived as nothing more than all the other attraction points, part of Saladin's ideal London world, «with the voice stinking of Yorkshire pudding and hearts of oak, that hearty, rubicund voice of ye olde dream –England which he so desperately wanted to inhabit» (180). The unseen, other world of their relationship is, however, an impossible dialogue –«I could never say anything to you, not really, not the least thing» (183)–, rudeness –«You interrupted me in public» (183)– and finally Pamela's insight unveiling the «empty space» behind his acted certainty.

In addition to accusing Saladin of a distorted, prejudiced England-view, Pamela sketches the realistic portrait of London, an image Saladin is not or does not want to be aware of: it is a London of injustice, racial prejudices, social acceptance limitations, violence to the other. Pamela, the deputy community relations officer and «damn good at it, ifisaysomyself» (183), relates:

We just elected our first black Chair and all the votes cast against him were white. Down the hatch! Last week a respected Asian street trader, for whom MPs of all parties had interceded, was deported after eighteen years in Britain because, fifteen years ago, he posted a certain form forty-eight hours late. Chin-chin! Next week in Brickhall Magistrates' Court the police will be trying to fit up a fifty-year-old Nigerian woman, accusing her of assault, having previously beaten her senseless. Skol! (183)

The real English normality differs from Saladin's «museum –values (...) hanging in golden frame on honorific walls» (399); Pamela refers to normality

in terms of «coppers taking their clothes off and drinking urine out of helmets» or «black people (...) scared out of their heads, talking about obeh, chicken entrails, the lot. The goddamn bastards are enjoying this: scare the coons with their own ooga booga and have a few naughty nights into the bargain» (280). Though «weird» or «unlikely», these are the true facets of England that Saladin must «wake up» to and with which Pamela is realistically faced on a regular basis. One must repetitively recall that, in the case of Saladin, however,

The imperial past [...] is the key to the spatial displacement, dislocation, relocation, and reconfiguration of the Commonwealth immigrants in London. They live in a Lefebvrian «conceived space» which is regulated by the ruling class of the host country whereas on the other hand, they themselves create their own «perceived space» in daily lives via memory, imagination, and other types of affect (Su, 2010: 250)

2.3. Zeeny Vakil – Being a Londoner –«bloody slave mentality» Zeeny Vakil, Saladin's Indian lover and intended rescuer, assumes the objective consciousness role, reflecting Saladin into the mirror of an unmythicized reality. Thus Zeeny points to his «Angreez accent» bluntly trying to make him aware that «it's [not] so perfect, it slips, baba, like a false moustache.» (52). What Saladin considers a successful English career in acting while in London –he is the heart of *The Aliens Show* (together with Mimi Mamoulian), his gift for mimicry earning him the title of «Man of a Thousand Voices and a Voice» (60)–, a fact that builds up to his Englishness, corresponds to Zeeny's denunciation: «They pay you to imitate them, as long as they don't have to look at you. Your voice becomes famous but they hide your face» (60). Later, but not very late, the very producer of the show, Hal Valance, will unveil the truth about it and will delineate Saladin's real position as an actor: «Audience surveys show that ethnics don't watch ethnic shows. (...) They want fucking Dynasty, like everyone else. Your profile's wrong. (...) you're history» (265).

Zeeny explains the evidence hiding beneath Saladin's blindness as to

his successful career, referring to the ‘wrong colour’ of his face as the reason for which only his voice is used. His ‘top’ position on the English voice scene is counterpoised, for Zeeny, by his travel to «wogland [India] with some two-bit company, playing the babu part (...) just to get into a play» (61), while Saladin’s enthusiasm and complete total dedication means nothing else than a «bloody slave mentality» (61).

2.4. Jumpy Joshy – a friend, not really. Jumpy Joshy, Saladin’s friend and next-in-bed with Pamela, shares the latter’s looking-down on Saladin, the Englishman in progress: his friend’s complex and full-hearted effort of becoming scales down to «an imitation of life, a mask’s mask» (174). Saladin’s English world, laboriously engineered and passionately inhabited, translates, for Joshy, into «the caricature of an actor’s room, full of signed photographs of colleagues, handbills, framed programmes, production stills, citations, awards, volumes of movie-star memoirs» (174) –there is no sign in Jumpy’s Saladin-view of the latter’s English adopted moral values, life-style, behavior pattern, or family constellation. England, in Saladin’s case, is «his England, the one he believed in» (175) or, as Michael Gorra puts it, Saladin is the one who was «desperately trying to write into being the self that one knows one can never fully achieve» (Gorra, 1997: 65) but of which he was convinced as the only genuine existence.

3

Gibreel Farishta and Apocalyptic London

London is perceived by Gibreel Farishta, the other protagonist of the novel, in terms of the saving mission he claims, under divine guidance. Consequently, we are faced with a metropolis of the doomed present, of an obsessive past and of a hardly perceivable future. Fear, conceit, despise, confusion and dream-like atmosphere, all are the «essences» that Gibreel, the angel-actor, perceives in the city he haunts, Shaitan's city overall.

London is a city that has lost its self-consciousness and, consequently, is weltering in the decrepitude of its furious and selfish present made up of masks and parodies, suffocated by the unbearable, yet undeniable, burden of its past and staring helplessly in the scarcity of its future.

Concluding, Gibreel labels London as «most slippery, most devilish of cities! – In which such stark, imperative oppositions were drowned beneath an endless drizzle of greys» (354). The ambiguous weather in London leads to ambiguous judgments as well which annul each other in a total indifference. London becomes the apocalyptic space of the confrontation between Gibreel and Saladin, the external space displaying inner feelings. London is the city which has turned «inarticulate, amorphous», «damp, suffocating, unbearable»: «This is not True London –not this untrue city. [...] He wanders among an amalgam of languages. Babel [...] God's Gate. Babilondon». The nightmarish atmosphere grows in intensity; objects seem to obtain independent status against the presence of any authentic and real human existence. Their density becomes asphyxiating and grotesque, calling for an imminent end state: debris, abandoned kitchen furniture, flat bicycle tires, doll legs, rotten vegetables, fast-food packages, rolling cans, broken careers, abandoned hopes, lost illusions, exhausted furies, accumulated bitterness, vomited fear and a rusted bathtub.

Objects and emotions alternate precipitously, at a delirious, end-of-the world speed, annihilating the borders between the human and the inhuman. Against this background, Gibreel starts his play at the trumpet, amidst a «world

of fire» The whole hallucinating conglomeration culminates when everything is burning, and Gibreel is blowing his trumpet, giving people what they want, their hair and teeth are red, glass is burning, while above his head birds with burning wings are flying. The apothotic evil of the world coincides with «the dark fire of evil» in Saladin's soul, the Shaandaar Café representing the apocalyptic meeting place of Gibreel and Saladin, the place around which «horizon closes.» London, after this moment, transforms itself into the city of the dead.

4

Imam's London – Exile as No Man's Land

The image of the Imam in Rushdie's novel stands different from that of Saladin Chamcha in terms of perceiving the experience of the «other» land. The Imam firmly delineates his status from the very beginning: an exile, as fundamentally opposed to all the other terminology used in defining the 'out of the native land' positioning: «Who is he? An exile. Which must not be confused with, allowed to run into, all the other words that people throw around: émigré, expatriate, refugee, immigrant, silence, cunning» (205).

Unlike the immigrant, for whom the new country means already the home country and to which he declares his unconditioned affiliation, the exile creates an artificial space within the boundaries of the foreign territory, trying to maintain it untouched and uncorrupted by the characteristics of the place. Therefore, the home of the Imam is a «rented flat», which he envisions as a «waiting-room, photograph, air» (206). There is a declared refusal of even acknowledging foreignness, the exile building a complete isolation scenario: «the curtains (...) are kept shut all day, because otherwise the evil thing might creep into the apartment» (208) or «Floors three to five of this block of mansion flats are, for the moment, all the homeland the Imam possesses» (208). Significantly for this attitude, the Imam calls this clearly delineated area as his «surrogate homeland», his «waiting room or transit lounge» (208).

Since the space of the exile means the preservation of the old rules, it logically involves the rejection of those elements and behavior typical for his forced location: in London,

In exile, the furniture is ugly, expensive, all bought at the same time in the same store and in too much of a hurry: shiny silver sofas with fins like old Buicks DeSotos Oldsmobiles, glass-fronted bookcases containing not books but clipping files. In exile the shower goes scalding hot whenever anybody turns on the kitchen

tap (...) In exile no food is ever cooked; the dark-spectacled bodyguards go out for take-away (208)

What would have been automatically embraced by the immigrant in his attempt to a successful integration within the much sought for new home country, functions, in the case of the exile, as dangerous realities whose sole effect is for him to get trapped into a realm which he loathes.

Consequently, back home becomes an idealized space, called «There», while the exile means «here», supplemented by everything that is connoted negatively: London is associated with «lustfulness, greed and vanity», «a hated city», «Sodom». Adaptation of the immigrant, his inscribing within the dynamics of the new homeland are at the opposite end of the exile's experienced feelings when relating to his 'loathed' situation: the gratitude for being accepted as an immigrant is replaced by the humiliation of «being given sanctuary» while the immigrant's failure in adapting equals the pride of the exile «to be able to say that he remained in complete ignorance of the Sodom in which he had been obliged to wait, ignorant, and therefore unsullied, unaltered, pure» (207). Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* has depicted the subversive aspect of mimicry:

Mimicry is, thus, the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which «appropriates» the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate; however, a difference or recalcitrance that coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both the «normalized» knowledge and disciplinary powers (Bhabha, 1994: 86)

Unlike Saladin Chamcha, the artist of a thousand voices, who, by mimicking vocal typology, did his best to get integrated into the British society, his new homeland, the Imam refuses specificity, attempting no effort in imitating

or acknowledging the rules of the new territory: «The Imam is a massive stillness, an immobility. He is living stone. (...) The Imam's eyes are clouded; his lips do not move. He is pure force, an elemental being: he moves without motion, acts without doing, speaks without uttering a word» (210).

5

Minor Voices, yet all Dissatisfied: Hind, Hal Valance and Sisodia

5.1. Hind's London – God's Punishment. For Hind, Muhammad Sufyan's wife, the owner of the the Shaandaar Café in London, England stands for her husband's revenge for not having let him obscenely approach her body, it is the villayet of her exile. England means losing traditions and customs, losing her husband's social status and consequently hers as well, renouncing happiness and easiness of behavior to Sufyan. Moreover, London is connoted with a demonic destination, the realm of arbitrariness, anarchy, decadence and immediate perils. The metropolis is the space of isolation, estrangement from her own people, the space in which her compatriots abjure / renegade their national origins and identity, their mother tongue.

For Hind—«Her language: obliged, now, to emit these alien sounds that made her tongue feel tired [...]» (234)— [...] the mother tongue holds a very important place in an exile's understanding of her exile. Either it must be run from, repressed, quashed and forgotten or it is the irretrievable homeland. The mother tongue takes on the metaphorical aspect of the motherland –whether the forgotten paradise of the exile's dreams, or the infernal hell to be escaped from, language and landscape are irrepressibly present. The difference within language constantly underlines the difference within the exile's self (Dascalu, 2011: 146-147)

Whenever Hind thinks about London, she does so by associating it with anonymity, plurality lacking personality, and commonality of being: the only existential trajectory she envisages is suffering the present, recalling a genuine past and preparing to die.

5.2. Hal Valance and Sisodia's London – a Business Only. From Hal Valance's perspective –he is the producer of *The Aliens Show* and a model of success– England, concentrated in London, is a business whose rules are clear: racism is normal, prejudices exist; what matters is the profit as a result of capitalizing on the image / appearances constructed in time: «I, for me, love this shitty country. That's why I intend to sell it all over the world: in Japan, in America, in shitty Argentina. [...] This is what I have sold all my life: this shit of a nation. Its flag» (354).

Sisodia, the magnate of the Indian film industry, shares the same pre-conceived perspective on London and the English people, as all foreign participants to the discourse on the foreign English realm: the history of England is entirely a colonial one, the Englishmen's behavior is a fearful one, while the majority of the Londoners are abnormal and hideous under an appearance of «aloof and stuffy» (256).

Conclusion

The image of London is one entirely based on «selling» preconceptions –from the fascination with the attraction points of the metropolis, continuing with behavioural patterns, to an entire moral system. Being a proper Englishman means, for Saladin, mimicking indiscriminately what he idealizes, in spite of the other voices (Pamela Chamcha, Zeeny Vakil, Changez Chamchawala) trying to make him aware of the hidden but real facet of the «cool Vilayet». It equally involves repudiating his past and past traditions and places, as a necessarily-to-be-blamed inferno, despite Saladin's superficiality in its approach and understanding.

For his father, Changez Chamchawala, living in London means living by fake standards and repudiating one's traditions, therefore being the obvious equivalent of living in shame and betrayal, annihilating hope and the future as such. For Pamela Lovelace, Saladin's wife, London is the image of two realities: on one hand, metropolis as a tourist's postcard, and on the other, London as the place of injustice, violence manifested to whoever is different, the migrant's prototype, racial conflicts and prejudices.

For Zeeny Vakil, an Indian, England and London cannot be but the place of the migrant's building up and practicing a slave mentality; similarly, Hind Sufyan, forced into migration by her husband, associates living in London with her family's and God's revenge and punishment. It also means losing traditions, lacking respectability, guiding one's life by the standards of anarchy, the arbitrary and decadence. London is a demonic destination and the punishment for being here is leading a life of isolation and anonymity.

Gibreel Farishta, the other protagonist of *The Satanic Verses*, shares Hind's perspective on London as an apocalyptic place, a devilish city on whose present temporality it is only masks and parodies of former lives that can survive. The peak of all negative connotations of London throughout the novel is axiomatically proclaimed by the exiled Imam – London is No Man's Land.

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