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Salman Rushdie, Migration and the View "From Below"

Abstract
The figure of the bird-man, which acquires a very particular and literal shape with the event of the airplane and the beginning of the twentieth century, becomes a frequently revisited controversial *topos* in the attempts to define the prevailing moods of that period. Some of its most conspicuous identifications include those of Italian poet and fight pilot Gabriele d'Annunzio, his follower Lauro de Bosis and Franz Kafka whose readings of the myth contribute to the inauguration of the twentieth century as the "age of Icarus" (Farrell 1993) registering its capacity to real both the "euphoric" and "tragically-mundane" prospects of flying. A much later interpretation of the myth suggests a significant shift of vision from these previous attitudes of commemoration or negligence of Icarus's fall towards a more dynamic perspective. What makes Icarus's itinerary a relevant route in the postcolonial articulation of migration is, above all, its capacity to represent the processes of rupture, disconnection and transformation of the migrant body (and identity) that take place in the course of migration.

Keywords: migration, Icarus, catoptric representation, homelessness, hybridity.

The "Age of Icarus"

The figure of the bird-man that acquires a very particular and literal shape with the event of the airplane and the beginning of the twentieth century becomes a frequently revisited controversial *topos* in the attempts to define the prevailing moods of that period. Some of its most conspicuous identifications include those of Italian poet and fight pilot Gabriele d'Annunzio, his follower Lauro de Bosis and Franz Kafka. D'Annunzio, whose literary and military ventures ensured him the place of a "national hero", announces his generation's "yearning for the sky" in the novel *Forse che sì, forse che no* (*Maybe Yes, Maybe No*): "Now suddenly, the Latin people remembered the first human wing which had fallen into the Mediterranean, the Icarian wing made up of hazel sticks, dried omentum of ox, and quill feathers from birds of prey". The account of the remembrance of Icarus's wing then flows into verse in a dramatic appeal to his will-be disciples: "A solitary wing is on the Sea … Who shall pick it up? Who with stronger bond/will be able to join again the scattered/feathers, to try once more the mad flight?" (D'Annunzio 1907, chapter 9, quoted in Boitani 2007: 28). In his turn, de Bosis joins the resurrection and dramatization of the myth of Icarus with the conclusion that "It is the Icarus myth, which incarnates more than any other the spirit of today" (Lauro de Bosis, *Icarus* 1927, quoted in Boitani 2007:

27). In a less spirited manner and after visiting the Brescia Air Show in 1909 (where he met d'Annunzio) Kafka reflects on the "winged" human condition in his *Second Notebook*:

> "He has wings," I cried to my comrades, and we who were at the head drew back a little, as much as those who pressed on our shoulders allowed it. "You wonder," the old man said, "that we all have wings, but they have been no use to us and, if we could tear them off, we would do it." "Why didn't you fly away?" I asked. "Fly away from our city? Leave our fatherland? The dead and the gods?" (1991: 12)

Joining the same tonality yet different in the intensity of the longing, each one of these pronouncements on the "spirit of the age" focuses on the paradigmatic mythic figure of the winged man Icarus whose "solitary wing … on the sea" has been "picked up" by numerous followers in the literal – but mostly literary skies. Although the myth has been read differently in different times, the attempts to decipher it largely reflect on two conflicting tenets: the euphoria of the flight and desire for the sky (which, however, can also be interpreted as "folly"[1]), and the sobriety of the fall, informed by a shift from heroically tragic to mundanely indifferent attitudes. The latter perspective unfolds in Pieter Bruegel the Elder's painting *The Fall of Icarus* (painted between 1555 and 1560), which poets like W.H. Auden rediscovered in the 1930s, fascinated with the indifference of the portrayed witnesses to the fall. The overall impression of the painting, Boitani suggests, is that of a suppressed miracle, the triumph of gravity over levity, the choice of mundane, but secure existence over "the mystery and splendor of departure" (2007: 157).

D'Annunzio, de Bosis and Kafka's readings of the myth contribute to the inauguration of the twentieth century as the "age of Icarus" (Farrell 1993: 123) registering its capacity to reveal both the "euphoric" and "tragically-mundane" prospects of flying. Significantly, D'Annunzio and Kafka are less concerned with the "euphoric" aspect of Icarus's flight than with his fall, and, more precisely, the remains of Icarus's body – a solitary wing (D'Annunzio), wings that cannot perform their function as their owners have opted for sedentary, home-based existence (Kafka). Wrapping one of the emblematic myths of mobility in such excessive immobility signals decadent fatigue, but it also points to the pre- and interwar growing sense of nationalism and threatened domesticity.

A much later interpretation of the myth suggests a significant shift of vision from these previous attitudes of commemoration or negligence of Icarus's fall towards a more dynamic perspective. In 2009, Smaro Kamboureli, a Greek-born Canadian academic and postcolonial critic, attempts to define the diasporic subject's

[1] Such interpretation is found in Giordano Bruno's *De gli eroici furori* (see Boitani 2007: 41).

ambivalent position and finds herself in a critical impasse. In trying to identify the reason for this predicament, she calls forth Walter Benjamin's angel of history – *angelus novus* (1969), whose gaze is always "turned toward the past" (2009: 7). Because of his limited vision, Homi Bhabha observes, he is the "guardian angel of the critics of nationalism" (Kamboureli 2009: 7), the keeper of origins, traditions and firmly-fixed boundaries. In this sense, the direction of the angel's gaze seems to correspond to the stagnant, sedentary perspective on Icarus's fall – his disfunct immobile wings, a leftover from the attempted flight, are eagerly appropriated by d'Annunzio as a possible symbol of national unity – "Now, suddenly, the Latin people remembered the first human wing …" (quoted in Boitani 28). Kamboureli's troublesome relationship with the angel of the past problematizes the ability of his unifocal gaze to communicate between past and present, which makes it likely to produce distorted figures: "We live in the shadow of his open wings … in the midst of the debris that he only gazes upon from afar" (2009: 8). As a postcolonial and diasporic critic, however, she confesses that she can "empathize with his predicament" (2009: 8) to the extent that her own problematic relationship with the past allows her to do so, but she places her trust in a different kind of angel, one that she finds in Wim Wenders' film *Wings of Desire* (1987) and that hovers in-between past and future. Wenders's angels are migrant figures who dwell inside the walls of Berlin's public library and are deprived of their angelic omnipotence. Expelled from heaven after they attempt to persuade God to abandon humanity in 1945, they are confined to a state of restricted freedom, visibility (only children can see them) and field of action. While longing to find their way back to heaven, they are likewise eager to enter the human world and live as humans in a bodily shape. The ambiguity of their position, then, consists in

> … a longing for what was lost, but also for what has not yet been experienced. […] this is not the kind of nostalgia that turns one's gaze backwards, towards some kind of originary point that might be nostalgically mythologised because it has been distanced or lost … It is, instead, a nostalgia for what is not yet known … (Kamboureli 2009: 9)

One of the angels decides to plunge into the human world, exposing himself to the vertiginous forces of transformation into a fully visible and painfully material creature. His transformation, Kamboureli observes, entails numerous signs of inevitable and wished loss – thinning hair, missing wings and angelic armor (which he trades for human clothes) – that speak of the "inevitability of translation, of acculturation, of (ex)changes" (2009: 13) that accompany his displacement. Seeing the fallen angel's position as an allegory for the diasporic subject's condition, she concludes that he "inhabit[s] a space where he [is] both displaced and at home … at odds with, yet steeped in history" (2009: 17).

Kamboureli's allegory points to some new uses of the mythic bird-man figure in the experience and articulation of postcolonial migration. Focusing on the failure of Icarus's flight like her early-twentieth-century predecessors, she does not see any point of remembering the very event of flying (as d'Annunzio appeals to his disciples) unless it becomes subject to re-membering, which, she argues, opens new routes of departure. Rather than commemorating Icarus's wings, she is concerned with his wingless fallen state, which, though making him visible to the human world, enables him to explore other, subversive routes of self-affirmation and continue his quest.

Migration, Translation, Hybridity. The Migrant Writer's Perspective

What makes Icarus's itinerary a relevant route in the postcolonial articulation of migration is, above all, its capacity to represent the processes of rupture, disconnection and transformation of the migrant body (and identity) that take place in the course of migration. The migrant movement (from Latin – *migrare* – to "wander", "roam"), as Søren Frank observes in his illuminating study on this subject, does not simply imply transition from one place to another (suggesting the linearity of a beginning-end, coming-leaving route), but points to a more general notion of displacement in which the aforementioned points of orientation may melt into a continuous flow of times and places[2]. The ensuing spatiotemporal instability appears to be a symptom of what Madina Tlostanova calls "[t]he imperial/colonial chronotope […] characterized by in-between-ness, the protean nature, the constant state of transit, nonfinality, parallel deterritorialisation and dehistorisation (i.e. falling out of space and time)" (2007: 406).

The spatiotemporal flimsiness of the migrant movement seems to activate the two intertwined directions of the aerial perspective – the vertical, which is associated with claims of rootlessness ("levity"), and the horizontal, which points to the ability of "stepping across" lines (see Rushdie's seminal lecture "Step Across This Line" (2002)). While the horizontal element of the spatiotemporal dynamics of migration enhances the geographical and temporal breadth of the migrant's experience as s/he encounters new places and is introduced to their historical and cultural specifics, the vertical axis acts subversively by providing the migrant subject with the euphoric and catastrophic dimensions of Icarus's fall and dismemberment (Gibreel Farishta and Salahuddin Chamchawala's angelico-satanic fall and landing on the shores of London in *The Satanic Verses*). I suggest that the vertical direction of migration, in particular, constitutes a pivotal axis in the postcolonial chronotope as it represents the ability of the migrant to surrender to different forms of metropolitan oppression, experience fracture and dismemberment (loss of wings), but also gain the means to "disarm" them while in this "defeated" state. I am going to explore how these

[2] See Søren Frank, *Migration and Literature* (2008).

directions operate as constituents of the migrant writer's perspective by reading two novels by one of the most widely discussed migrant writers – Salman Rushdie.

Migration's affinity to writing is the subject of Frank's study, which observes some overlapping of the two activities. The closest correspondence lies in the "nomadic" drive in writing, the desire to render the "transcendental homelessness of the idea"[3] in "a literary form" (Lukács quoted in Frank 21). The statement that "all fiction is homesickness" (George 1999: 1) slightly changes the prism of this definition, by adding a nostalgic gesture towards the past, proposing the presence of a "home" that can be re-accessed through fiction. While both perspectives "tilt" the notion of fiction at different angles, they come together in the awareness that "writing", like "roaming" amounts to a flow-like movement, in which time and space bend to produce new forms and multiple lines are crossed.

The capacity of fiction to provide itineraries of migration is welcomed with enhanced awareness in the twentieth century when, as Frank observes, mass movements of people took place on a previously unseen scale. The technologies brought about planet-shrinkers (the airplane outstanding among them), the two world wars brought about disorder and collapse of the western colonial empires, decolonisation spawned new waves of mass movement. While it is true that the concept of migration is, above all, transhistorical, extending beyond the particularity of an "epochal" event, its unprecedented growth in recent times along with the daily reality of globalization made twentieth-century literature particularly sensitive to these phenomena.

Within such contextual limits, the migrant writer can easily be envisaged as a major intellectual figure of the century. Salman Rushdie, a migrant writer of Indian-Pakistani origin, both articulates and exemplifies this position in his life and writing. His lifetime coincides with the turbulent political processes that mark India's decolonisation and stage an accelerated wave of postcolonial migration. The latter forms a significant part of his experience and is widely problematized in his works.

Born in Bombay, the city which contains the "sea of stories" that gave birth to his life-narrative ("This turbulent sea was the sea outside my bedroom window in Bombay. It is the sea by which I was born, and which I carry within me wherever I go" (*Imaginary Homelands* 438–9)), Rushdie moved to England at thirteen, as his Cambridge-educated father insisted; earned, in his turn, a Cambridge degree in history, spent time attempting to settle in London (in spite of the far-reaching consequences of *The Satanic Verses* affair), and recently moved to New York. The sense of movement in time and space prevails in his biography and is the guiding spirit of all his works. In fact, it is very difficult to say which assumes a higher ontological level – his life story or his fictional narratives. Much like Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of *Midnight's Children*, who claims to be the text of the novel, "a comma, a word, a sentence, a paragraph, a chapter" (1995: 125), Rushdie experiences a very

[3] See his essay "Theory of the Novel" (1914–1915).

particular relationship between the *bíos* (life) and *gráphos* (writing) in his *post-fatwa* life and quests, which suggests a kind of reverse "re-writing" of the author by his book. The accusations of blasphemy, culminating in Ayatollah Khomeini's notorious pronouncement of Rushdie's death sentence after the publication of *The Satanic Verses* in 1988-9, assisted to Rushdie's "downward migration" from the world of narrative authority into the world of the narrated. As a result, he had to spend more than five years of restricted life under police surveillance and face the delimiting finality of controversial labels, but this experience sharpened the subversive angle of the writer's vision, enabling him to observe and articulate the world "above" from "below".

The Rushdie affair had worldwide repercussions. Radical Muslims organized demonstrations and public burnings of the "satanic" book counting several victims, the Japanese translator of the novel was killed, its Italian translator and Norwegian publisher were attacked but, luckily, remained alive. Rushdie's situation improved when in 1997 Muhammed Khatami, a moderate cleric, was elected on the presidency of Iran, and set about trying to improve relations with Europe and America in the hope that Iran would be able to benefit from the lucrative trade agreements from which it had been excluded. The *fatwa*, however, being a religious document that does not comply with secular agreements, could not be revoked and is still in force. In 2007 Rushdie was pronounced "Sir" and accorded the honours of knighthood apparently as a sign of appreciation of his ongoing battle. While these events certainly contributed to his worldwide popularity, they ultimately helped to generate his satanico-angelic image in the public space, which seems to echo the Luciferian transformation of the protagonists of *The Satanic Verses*.

Still ignorant of the afflictions to which writing would expose him, Rushdie began his first novel, *Grimus* (1975), after an unsuccessful attempt to settle down in Pakistan and work there for the television service in Karachi. Although the novel did not enjoy critical acclaim, it introduces his preferred thematic focus – the migrant's quest of Elsewhere – and offers insight into his more fully developed manner of narration. These two aspects of the text, the former related to the content, the latter – to its form, likewise reveal the co-presence of two fictions that have remained stable influences on Rushdie since his childhood. The first is the Hollywood film *The Wizard of Oz*, based on Lyman Frank Baum's eponymous novel, from which Rushdie borrowed the land of Oz as a metaphor for Otherness ("Elsewhere"), and the turbulent space of air as a metaphoric space of migration; the second – *The Arabian Nights* – made him sensitive to the cyclical narrative movements, characteristic of eastern story-telling. While the former inspired his intense use of the rhetoric of homelessness, the "over-the-rainbow", "aerial" vocabulary of uprootedness and the "no-such-place-on-earth" definition of "home" (see his critical appraisal of the movie of the same name); the latter equipped him with a story-telling model of identity: "I think stories are what we are, we all live in our stories of ourselves" (Rushdie in

conversation with Llosa). For him, both migration and story-telling are essentially concerned with metamorphosis and hybridization, severing of ties and forming new connections, in which selves and stories constantly flow in and out of each other: " 'Things – even people – have a way of leaking into each other,' I explain, 'like flavours when you cook" (*Midnight's Children* 1995: 44–5).

Rushdie's pre-*fatwa* works elaborate the relationship between story-telling and migration to the point when the migrations between the "secular" and "sacred" modes of vision in his narratives start compromising the "innocence" of story-telling. In attempting to fend off the accusations of blasphemy leveled at his secularised representations of sacred discourses in *The Satanic Verses*, he explains that the "offensive" sequence concerning Prophet Muhammad "happened in a dream, the fictional dream of a fictional character, an Indian movie-star, who is losing his mind" (Weatherby 1990: 129). The interaction of the innocence ("levity") and power ("gravity") of enunciation is subject to constant negotiation in Rushdie's narratives. In *Midnight's Children* (1981), his second novel and also the one that secures his initiation in world literature, it takes the form of Saleem Sinai's ability to disconnect himself imaginatively from his biological parents by inventing a fictionalised version of his genealogy, and the oppressive presence of too many stories in himself, that, finally, crack his frame. In *Shame* (1983) and *The Satanic Verses* the gravity-levity paradigm takes on a more articulate form in the representation of migrants as both "rooted" and "winged", i.e. rootless. *Shame*, which tells the story of male oppression and the culture of shame in Pakistan, is also the novel where he uses an elaborate aerial vocabulary to describe the migrant condition:

> And I have a theory that the resentments we mohajirs [migrants] engender have something to do with our conquest of the force of gravity. We have performed the act of which all men anciently dream, the thing for which they envy the birds; that is to say, we have flown.
>
> I am comparing gravity with belonging. Both phenomena observably exist: my feet stay on the ground, and I have never been angrier than on the day my father told me he had sold my childhood home in Bombay. But neither is understood. We know the force of gravity, but not its origins; and to explain why we become attached to our birthplaces we pretend that we are trees and speak of roots. Look under your feet. You will not find gnarled growths spouting through the soles. Roots, I sometimes think, are a conservative myth, designed to keep us in our places. (1983: 90–1)

Being both "heavy", because of the gravity forces that act upon them, and "light", because "on the move", migrants abide the uncertain space of constant self-relocation. *The Satanic Verses* amplifies Rushdie's vision of migration by a

more complex representation of the levity-gravity modalities. This time, they resurface in the life narratives of two Indian-born migrants in England whose migration translates them, literally, into a quasi-angelic figure and a quasi-satanic goatman. Rather than representing the conventional opposition of Good and Evil, the novel invalidates it as each of the polar opposites proves to contain traces of his rival. For example, Gibreel, when invoked two times by Mahound, the founder of a religion of "obedience" (the name Mahound itself is employed ambiguously in the text[4]), admits that he himself inspired the false verses. Finally, Gibreel becomes the angel of death. Saladin, on the other hand, apart from his satanic goatlike figure and sulphurous breath, is definitely not an embodiment of absolute evil, and is merely "human". The disruption of categorisations in the novel establishes the ambiguous nature of the migrant condition as a "translated" existence of impurity and hybridity. It gravitates towards the episode of the falsely translated "satanic verses" which is at the narrative core of the novel and illustrates Rushdie's desire to reflect on the potential of ambiguity.

Rushdie's post-fatwa novels reprise his quests albeit with an enhanced awareness of rupture and imprisonment. During his years of restriction, he developed and accomplished his novel for children *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990), which was written for his son Zaphar, from whom events had separated him, but the novel also forms part of Rushdie's fatwa-targeted defense of the freedom of speech; he likewise wrote *Homelands*, a collection of essays from 1981 to 1991; "The Wizard of Oz," published in 1992; a collection of short stories, *East, West* (1994); *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995). They abound in tropes of imprisonment and redemptive story-telling. The novels that follow, along with the collection of critical essays *Step Across This Line* (2002) – *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), *Fury* (2001, after settling down in New York), *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), his autobiographical work *Joseph Anton: A Memoir* (2012) and his rewrite of the *Arabian Nights – Two Years, Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights* (2015) – share an expanded vision of the migrant's problematic movement as more de-territorializing, far-reaching and cosmopolitan, in which the "gravity" of belonging is questioned by the "ground beneath" the migrant's "feet".

Echoing the "elevated" position of aerial observation, Rushdie elaborates an impressive optical system of "subterranean superiority" that reworks the "aerial" lens of visual supremacy into a broken mirror, "It may be that when the Indian writer who writes from outside India tries to reflect that world, he is obliged to deal in broken mirrors …" (*Imaginary* 10–11), "But human beings do not perceive things whole; we are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of frac-

[4] The name is associated with the Crusades, when the Arabs had overrun the Holy Land and Islam was seen as the enemy, the Prophet as the Devil (Goonetilleke 1998: 99). In the novel Mahound is both the devil and the Prophet Muhammad; it is implied that both satanic and sacred verses may exist.

tured perceptions" (*Imaginary* 12). This type of vision, Rushdie continues, allows meaning to be gleaned "out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved; perhaps it is because our sense of what is the case is constructed from such inadequate materials that we defend it so fiercely, even to the death" (*Imaginary* 12). Although here he opts for a more general configuration of migrancy as a general human condition, the benefits (and pitfalls) of such fragmented vision have an enhanced instrumental value for migrant writers like him. The broken mirror is not simply a medium of reflection, it forms part of what Vassilena Parashkevova calls a system of "catoptric representation", which makes it possible to perceive things through a multiplicity of refracted reflections, a variety of equally tenable itineraries, times and places where no single view dominates the observed. Catoptric vision, this way, acts a major part in postcolonial writing as a subversive technique of contestation of hegemonic perspectives.

Reworking the Myth of Flying in Rushdie's Fiction

The "mystery and splendor of departure" makes the central subject of Rushdie's writing. He himself acknowledges in his critical appraisal of the film "The Wizard of Oz" that departure is "a dream at least as powerful as its countervailing dream of roots… It is a celebration of Escape, a grand paean to the Uprooted Self, a hymn – the hymn – to Elsewhere" (1992: 23). The accounts of flying in his novels are invariably related to the peregrinations of his migrant protagonists – their ascents and descents, transformations and translations, uncertain identities, origins and itineraries. His records of departure, however, are informed by the awareness that departure does not necessarily imply an arrival, that the Elsewhere – which implicitly traces a home-quest – is not a destination, but the space we enter "once we have left our childhood places and started out to make up our lives ... understand[ing] that the real secret … is not that 'there's no place like home', but rather that there is no longer any such place as home…" (*Imaginary Homelands* 57, Rushdie's italics). Declaring "home" a myth, Rushdie sets himself to construct the space of the Elsewhere as the space of migration, disconnection, uprootedness – and flying.

He introduces us to the myth of flying in the very first of his novels which, unlike the later ones, do not enjoy the expected critical acclaim. *Grimus* tells the story of Flapping Eagle, an American Indian who, having drunk an elixir that confers immortality, spends 777 years crossing oceans in search of an antidote to agelessness and in order to find his sister Bird-Dog who has been kidnapped by godlike Grimus. He is led to Calf Mountain, which exists in another dimension, under the water, and enters the world imagined, ordered and controlled by Grimus. A closer look at Flapping Eagle's itinerary reveals a detail that suggests a possible reference to Icarus and the figure of the bird-man. The Icarus-related elements of Flapping Eagle's quest include the seas and oceans over which he roams, as well as his plunge

into the Mediterranean that opens access to Grimus's island. The plunge itself is experienced as entrance – not end – into another world. Unlike Icarus, Flapping Eagle is not washed dead on the shore. Rather, his fall exposes him to the fluidity and transformation which Rushdie conceptualises in his later fully-fledged representations of the migrant's itinerary. As Andrew Teverson insightfully observes, Rushdie's first novel provides us with the outlines, though not entirely specified yet, of the migrant's condition: "… Flapping Eagle …. is a migrant who leaves his place of origin, travels through the world in search of a new (but elusive) homeland and, in the process, becomes … unsure of the ground beneath his feet" (2007: 112–113).

The motif of fall and survival takes clearer shape in Rushdie's mature novels where it is almost always represented as a disturbing experience of uprooting, metamorphosis and translation. Rushdie's notorious novel *The Satanic Verses* opens with the protagonists' spectacular fall from a jumbo-jet through a tunnel of clouds where they metamotphose into the satanic and angelic versions of Lucifer. Throughout the fall they enter air, "the most insecure and transitory of zones" (1989: 4), where they observe and experience the disintegration of the world to which they belong, and enter a world of infinite possibilities:

> [a]bove, behind, below them in the void there hung reclining seats, stereophonic headsets, drink trolleys, motion discomfort receptacles … Also – for there had been more than a few migrants aboard, yes, quite a quantity of wives who had been grilled by reasonable, doing-their-job officials … a sufficiency of children upon whose legitimacy the British Government had cast its ever-reasonable doubts – mingling with the remnants of the plane, equally fragmented, equally absurd … (1989: 4)
>
> … [But] when you throw everything up in the air…anything becomes possible… (1989: 5)

Rushdie's account of the migrants' journey in the air raises a number of correspondences to the mythical readings of flying and opens them to ironic revision. Above all, the migrants' fall is forced and spectacularly unheroic – it follows the collapse of the machine that, having assumed the mythic position of the flying bird-man-angel-deity, threatens aerial myths with rational explanation. Moreover, the plane is hijacked, which places the whole episode in the extremely precarious location of contemporary terror wars. The contemporary context is further expanded to the highly problematic event of migration that has currently become a worldwide concern. However, Rushdie does not redeem flying from its mythological connotations. The protagonists' metamorphoses into angelico-devilish figures as they pass through a tunnel of clouds testify to the presence of a couple of myths among which Lucifer's fall and the Hindu myths of rebirth and reincarnation, along with the Christian concept of new birth that Rushdie reworks to represent the migrant condition.

Viewed from this perspective, the fall in the opening chapter of *The Satanic Verses* represents the controversial forces that act upon the migrants' bodies and identities in the process of migration. On the one hand, they experience loss of solid ground beneath their feet, fragmentation and spectacular objectification. On the other, however, they are faced with the opportunity of metamorphosis and translation, which makes it possible for them to survive after the fall.

The migrants' fall begins with their ambiguous condition, signaled by the explosion in the air. It suggests a collapse of home-like order and roles: husbands, wives and children fall in the air along with remnants of the plane. Family, conventionally seen as a seat of traditions and shaper of identity, a symbol of stability that is often extended to larger political units such as the nation or the state, is brought to the point of disintegration. What Rushdie makes explicit in his reading of migration through the metaphor of the air-space is that displacement of this kind challenges the figures of solidity that are present in the migrant's itinerary. As Ursula Kluwick observes in her illuminating essay on the relationship between flying and migration in Rushdie's fiction, he uses flight as a metaphor for deracination, the latter implying "loosening of ties that contrasts with the notion of belonging" ("The Wonders and Perils of Air").

Apart from loss of "the ground", of solid foundations, Rushdie's migrants themselves experience disintegration: "there floated the debris of the soul, broken memories, sloughed-off selves, severed mother-tongues…" (1989: 4). Their identities become uncertain and fluid as the fall proceeds, the loss of origin results in identity crisis. Some of Rushdie's other novels read this aspect of migration positively – as a chance for liberation and movement forward into the future. In *Shame* (1983) the narrator links the migrant condition with "the conquest of the force of gravity" (85) and suggests that migration, like flying, is the accomplishment of one of humanity's oldest dreams of liberty. In *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) the protagonist Moraes Zogoiby ("the Moor") embarks upon his final itinerary (and hope of freedom) when he decides to quit the oppressive reality of Bombay on board of a Spain-bound plane. In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) air is the space that the central characters enter after taking their decision to move away from the narrow enclosure of home and "conquer" the world with music. However, as the beginning of *The Satanic Verses* suggests, migration may be experienced as a fall, a down-bound flight in which migrants lose their identities. The latter is signified by their extreme objectification as floating remnants that mingle with the remnants of the plane.

On the other hand, Rushdie does offer a more positive interpretation of the migrants' fall in *The Satanic Verses* by following the spectacular "dance", singing and attempt to fly of the two falling protagonists Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha. The positive reading calls forth myths of death and rebirth and shapes them according to Rushdie's philosophy of loss and gain in translation. The metaphoric significance of air fits well in his conceptualisation of the metamorphic experience of migration. In an interview with Günther Grass Rushdie explains that "I formed the

idea that the act of migration was to turn people somehow into things, into people who had been translated, who had, so to speak, entered the condition of metaphor" (2000: 77). He further explains the relationship between migration, translation and metaphor in terms of common etymology:

> [T]he very word metaphor, with its roots in the Greek words for bearing across, describes a sort of migration, the migration of ideas into images. Migrants – borne-across for translated humans – are metaphorical beings in their very essence; and migration, seen as a metaphor, is everywhere around us. We all cross frontiers; in that sense, we are all migrant peoples. (2000: 278–79)

Defined this way, the migrant condition is seen as produced by a shift from one place or meaning to another. This move which is suggestive of loss but also gain, transformation as translation and transplantation, offers the conceptual frame of Rushdie's explanation of how newness enters the world – both through death and new birth, and through new and unexpected combinations. The following two quotes exemplify these perspectives: "'To be born again,' sang Gibreel Farishta tumbling from the heavens, "first you have to die… To land upon the bosomy earth, first one needs to fly" (1989: 3). "Mélange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and bit of that is how newness enters the world" ("In Good Faith" 393). As a space of the all-possible, air becomes the most inviting environment of such transformations and the most suitable trope to represent them in Rushdie's fiction.

As in *Grimus*, the protagonists' sea-bound fall in *The Satanic Verses* is reminiscent of the fall of Icarus. Rushdie's account, however, tells it in the opposite direction – they start singing and flapping their imagined wings while falling – not as they soar above, as one would expect. Moreover, they sing Indian *ghazals* – which makes the whole experience rather comic, postcolonial and subversive. It is the fall – rather than the rising above – that enables the protagonists' safe landing; the landing itself, rather than lamenting their deaths, is described through allusions to the conquest of the English coast. The triumphant fall enables the migrants' access to a multiplicity of worlds at different ontological levels in the novel but they enter all of them as subversive figures, translated falsely by master narratives, and because of that, capable of disrupting the very narratives that have produced them.

Conclusion

The myth of flying represents a large share of the intertextuality in Rushdie's novels. His reading and rewriting of the air space is informed by postcolonial sensitivity to the unsettled and metamorphic state of the migrant, an attitude Rushdie apparently developed in his own experience of displacement. Apart from his various interpretations and reworking of the aerial myths in the context of migration, a distinguishing feature of the flight-related experiences of his characters is that the inconsistency

and shape-shifting they undergo is not reserved solely to the air space they enter. The ground-sky dichotomy which implies a series of relationships such as “gravity-levity”, “safety – insecurity”, “home-away”, but also “confinement-liberation”, “mortality-infinity”, is dismantled in Rushdie’s treatment of the myths.

The concept of “migration” itself implies the idea of dis-placement, i.e. the assumption that migration, apart from being an act of movement beyond the boundaries of place (and home as its idealised version), is also experienced as a relief from the tensions of fixed locations. This movement is far from unproblematic as it produces, to borrow Sara Upstone’s insightful metaphor, a fulcrum of instability which refuses to turn in either the direction of arrival or departure: “For what we find in the postcolonial narrative is often a new kind of journey: one with no arrival or departure, without the desire for settlement but instead filled with the potential of constant chaotic movement” (2009: 59). The postcolonial journey takes the form of a constant movement that does not end with the migrant’s arrival in the “host” country, nor does it account for the beginning of the journey as “leaving home”. This itinerary encourages reading migrant space as a kind of mythic space, forming part of “the ‘imagined geography’ of transculturation as an intentionally invented space, based on various cultural topoi, recreating and rethinking the artistic reality, distorting the angles under which it is placed in relation to the real world” (Tlostanova 2007: 407). The “inventedness” of postcolonial space is not only a matter of postcolonial imagination that seeks to define a politically unlimited territory. It is conditioned by the transcultural position and subjectivities of writers who work beyond “the conglomerate of locale, ethnic culture and time as the basis of poetological system typical for authenticity discourses” (2007: 407).

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