

Fury and Fall: Rushdie, Derrida, and Milton

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Abstract:

Malik Solanka, historian of ideas and world-famous doll maker, steps out of his life, abandons his family in London, and flees for New York. There's a fury within him, and he fears he has become dangerous to those he loves. With this overall plot in mind, the present essay articulates this ex-centric, unusual, and uncanny fury in relation to John Milton's *Paradise Lost* with a view also to discussing Jacques Derrida's notion of *destinerrance* as a possible alternative to literary influence and as a further elaboration on intertextuality in general. The essay also examines what sorts of religious, literary, philosophical, and/or mythical references that appear throughout the novel and that resonate to the epic poem. Rushdie writes, "Life is fury... Fury—sexual, Oedipal, political, magical, brutal—drives us to our finest heights and coarsest depths." In brief, this fury can and ought to be related to the Fall and its outcomes.

Key-Words: Rushdie, intertextuality, fiction, influence

To judge from recent criticism, readers of Salman Rushdie are having increasing difficulty with the fact that his fiction, however it is defined, issues in the intertextual quality of literature in general. If the regenerative power of his fiction becomes the central core around which plot is both constructed and deconstructed, what are we to make of the intertexts in *Fury*, Rushdie's *fin-de-siècle* chronicle of life in transnational cultures and translocal subject positions? To be sure, there are disagreements among the proponents of what Sarah Brouillette has argued, "*Fury* rather parades its biographical masking" in that both *The Puppet Kings* and *Fury* "are about lives making their way into fictions and fiction making its way, all too viscerally, back into the world where meaning is made." (2005, p. 151) Brouillette even asserts that "the [novel] is not about Rushdie's life, but about 'Rushdie' as a brand name, as a paratext, and as an icon" (2005, p. 151).

There are also disagreements over whether *Fury* is "an acrid, sharp, self-critical portrait of an angry man in an anger-inducing world," as Merle Rubin (2001) maintains in his assessment of the novel, or over how we are to respond to Robert Edric's "un-premeditated" tirades against Rushdie's writing by asserting that "the real problem with *Fury* lies not so much with its absurd and near non-existent plot or with its failure to deliver, but with the writing itself." (2001, p. 39) But even the advocates of Rushdie's

pliable language and culturally mobile fiction – and this has been the most helpful of recent approaches – have been reluctant to ascribe full importance to what happens to intertextuality in his fiction. Nonetheless, we still may think of Rushdie's intertextsⁱⁱ as drawing attention to the fabricated nature of his fiction and to his serious plays with allusions to other texts, which somehow provide us with his fiction's crucial moments.

The most acute of *Fury*'s recent readings, indeed, builds from the claim that the novel establishes an intertextual relation with Yeats's poem, "The Second Coming," and that the millennium is represented in the novel in terms of simulacra (the novel's puppets) replacing the real; and that as a result,

the novel fittingly ends intertextually when Solanka attempts to catch his son's attention by bouncing higher and higher on a bouncy castle on Hampstead Heath. The intertext is the epigraph in Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, an extract from a poem by D'Invilliers, a fictional character in Fitzgerald's first novel, *This Side of Paradise*.ⁱⁱⁱ (Finney, 2011)

In addition, certain intertextual features in Rushdie's *Fury*, as well as analogous situations elsewhere in Rushdie's fiction, present us with an intricate intertextual scenario that needs further elaboration.^{iv} Such intertexts may even be said to trigger the plot of the novel by creating an-other paradise and another side of paradise, which is characteristically Miltonic "action." It is my purpose here to show how pervasive the "action" of *Paradise Lost* is in relation to *Fury* and how Jacques Derrida's notion of *destinerrance* may help to problematize causal and mechanic ideas related to literary influence in general and intertextuality in particular.

Some such purpose may be made evident in the way an ex-centric, unusual, and uncanny fury, as Rushdie writes, "Life is fury ... sexual, Oedipal, political, magical, brutal [which] drives us to our finest heights and coarsest depths," (30)^v resonates to the epic poem and can be related to the Fall and its outcomes. The novel's protagonist, the mild Malik Solanka, a Cambridge-educated millionaire from Bombay, is looking for an escape from himself. While consuming, alone in the kitchen, three bottles of wine, he

passes through self-pity and enters a terrible, blaming anger; he finds himself upstairs holding a carving knife over the sleeping bodies of his wife and his four-year-old son, “on his side, curled tightly into her, sleeping the pure deep sleep of innocence and trust.” (108) Solanka, trapped in his loss of spirit, reason, and fallen into the deepest recesses of anger, fury, decides to leave his family and go to New York, where “everyone was [there] to lose themselves. Such was the unarticulated magic of the masses, and these days losing himself was just about Professor Solanka’s only purpose in life.” (7)

In this loss as escape from himself, Solanka is basically trying to “formulate his thoughts on the perennial problem of authority and the individual,” (23) much in the same way his friend Dubdub, Krysztof Waterford-Wajda, had years before given lectures on Voltaire’s *Candide* and come to the conclusion that “this is as good as it gets. The perfectibility of man is just, as you might say, God’s bad joke.” (22) In retrospection, Solanka’s loss of faith in academia, God, and himself, and his fall into anger and fury resemble the existential crisis his friend Dubdub had fallen into years before and that had been characterized as the result of “all that globetrotting *Magic Christian Derridada*,” (27) pure and simple performance gauged against the hard facts of life. According to the narrator, if one were searching for explanations, Dubdub’s suicide

helped trigger Professor Solanka’s metamorphosis. Professor Solanka, remembering his dead friend in New York, realized that he had followed Dubdub in so many things; in some of his thinking, yes, but also into *le monde médiatique*, into America, into crisis.” (28)

It is from this point on that Solanka, and Rushdie himself, will prove to be the rightful heirs to Milton’s *Paradise Lost* in the figure of his epic character Satan.

To view *Fury* in this way, I believe, is to recover -- and necessarily to redefine the connections between the epic and the novel not in terms of literary influence or solely in terms of the “purpose of most intertexts found in *Fury*” (Finney, 2011) --, but, as I will show, these connections need to be regarded in terms of *destinerrance*. This

term is used by the Franco-Algerian philosopher, Jacques Derrida, in *Paper Machine* (2005, p. 89) and points to the untenable line of a possible decision to interpret the name, memory, tradition, and to the impossible decision of interpretation as a means of closure, fixity, exclusion. The term *destinerrance*, I now propose, comprises also the following notions: a set of texts supposedly fatal, linked by a burden, concocted by fate and pointing to an end whose design is incomplete; that which one inherits (critically), that which is transmitted in the name that becomes memory and this same memory becoming tradition (of a poetics); the texts that wander, err, follow different paths by chance and in an uncertain way. *Destinerrance*, as I now read it, unites under one heading destiny, inheritance, and errancy.

The destiny of Professor Solanka as Milton's Satan-like character is just prefigured in his metamorphosis, for he "had shed more skins than a snake," which made him come to the realization that "the harsh reality was perhaps that he was acting not against nature but according to its dictates," and hence, "when he stood naked before the unvarnished mirror of truth, this was what he was really like," (29) a snake. At the outset of Solanka's fury, the moral and intellectual refluxes seem divorced from fate, but quite linked to the notion of inheritance: Solanka seems to have inherited from Milton's Satan "the hidden twisting in him, the dreadful torque of his doubt, until the day he snapped and the alien burst out of his stomach, baring multiple rows of teeth." (30) Many details in the novel, taken together with what Solanka soon realizes – "This is what we are, what we civilize ourselves to disguise—the terrifying human animal in us, the exalted, transcendent, self-destructive, untrammeled lord of creation" (31) – suggest a whole, which is also a kind of errancy.

Like the Satan of Milton, Solanka errs on the streets of New York, a veritable inferno, and gets "lost inside himself." (39) Unlike the Satan of *Paradise Lost*, who is forever enclosed in "gloomiest shade," (X. 516)^{vi} Solly Solanka has sought to find some ease by for-getting "the postcolonial, migrational niceties," (35) "this new cultural hypersensitivity," (36) even "this melting pot or *métissage* of past power," (43) only to focus on the fact that "the human capacity for automorphosis, the transformation of the self, which Americans claimed as their own special, defining characteristic," (55) was

available to everyone and to the rest of the created world. Solanka's meta-automorphosis is accomplished when "he stopped hyphenating himself and became, simply, an American." (57)

This association of Americans to the fallen creatures and of America to Hell is ironic if we take into consideration that Milton's epic informs the novel in close proximity and that the seventeenth-century long poem associated America and its inhabitants to paradise and to the living beings of Eden. What I want to emphasize here is that Rushdie's *Fury* forges, simultaneously, continuities and discontinuities with *Paradise Lost* and that both can be summed up under the notion of *destinerrance*. In the case above, we may think of textual errancy, that capacity every text has to circulate randomly, to plight as a mirror of our (authors' and readers') fickle state, and to reach our ears disjointed, surviving its journey only as sound and fury.^{vii}

"In making his transglobal journey," (239) Malik Solanka resembles more and more Milton's Satan: he relocated, as well as his friend Rhinehart, to "the bosom of the Great Satan hisself" (68), he changed in kind, "the hideous deterioration, that was taking place," (68) he applied to himself "the complete erasure, or 'master deletion,' of the old program," (79) and, above all, he relentlessly made the move downwards when to him, "the steps down into that inferno seemed inexorable. And the worse inferno he would leave behind, the burning blade turning forever in the mind's eye of his growing son." (80) The fatal (fateful) text that is recalled, the textual burden or responsibility that is carried (out), here, is surely *Paradise Lost*. The pattern is reiterated in the next chapter (8) when Solanka denies the existence of the creator and proclaims the sole existence of creatures whose material, "clay, of which God, who didn't exist, made man, who did ... was the paradox of human life: its creator was fictional, but life itself was a fact." (95) This intimate impulse has a local residence within the novel, for we hear Solanka "thank the God who doesn't exist" (133) in chapter 10, and in chapter 17, we are told by the narrator that "the creation was real while the creator was the counterfeit!" (239)

"The framework for a fictional beast capable of constant metamorphosis," (190)

we are told by the narrator who simulates Solanka's musings about his own (dolly) creations, may be concocted by fate and point to an incomplete design, and as such, we see Solanka again telling himself that "he deserved no better than this. Let the worst befall. In the midst of the collective fury of these unhappy isles, a fury far greater, running far deeper than his own pitiful rage, he had discovered a personal Hell." (246) What seems so striking about this passage, I think, is its closeness to Satan's un-heroic and chronic articulation of his fall: "The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a heav'n of hell, a hell of heav'n" (I. 54-55) or "Me miserable! which way shall I fly / Infinite wrath and infinite despair? / Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell; / And in the lowest deep a lower deep, / Still threat'ning to devour me, opens wide, / To which the hell I suffer seems a heaven," (IV. 73-78) and yet, another dramatizing of Satan's rousing motions, "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven." (I. 263) I am arguing, in other words, for the connections and associations between Solanka and Satan to be taken as *destinerrance*, an incomplete design. Solanka is not Satan, he simply takes after Milton's Satan, and this happens to be a case of textual inheritance. It is also as if Solanka were Milton's Satan's rightful heir, and thus formed a tradition that is caught in its be-coming: to roam "In this unhappy Mansion," (I. 268) to reach the "utmost Isles" (I. 521; The British Isles), and be trailed in the pandemonium of a multicultural megalopolis, which is New York.^{viii}

Again, as we accompany Satan-Solanka in his transglobal journey, we see him immersed in religious, philosophical conundrums that are phrased thus: "We fear [excess] in ourselves, our boundary breaking, rule-disposing, shape-shifting, transgressive, trespassing shadow-self;" (128) in rhetorical questions such as: "Solanka heard a crucial, ignored, unanswered, perhaps unanswerable question – the same question, loud and life-shattering as a Munch scream, that he had just asked himself: is this all there is?" (184) or in more pagan terms, "What chance did mortal man have against the devious malice of the gods?;" (233) and in an article of (disguised) faith, "is it better to be loved or feared?" (244) Other references to time immemorial myths and philosophies abound in the novel^{ix} and other narrative devices are clearly inserted in *Fury*: meta-fictional digressions, ("The ransacking of the world's storehouse of old

stories and ancient histories was entirely legitimate,” 190) self-reflexive moments, (“whole infernos could be conjured forth …which had shaped his destiny and whose memory he had suppressed for over half a lifetime, Methwold’s Estate,” 220) post-modern awareness of genre as hybrid and defying hierarchies, (“Solanka had devoured the science fiction novels … recognized as the form’s golden age. In flight from his own life’s ugly reality, he found in the fantastic –its parables and allegories, but also its flights of pure invention, its loopy, spiraling conceits …[a] home,” 169) and a whole chapter inset dedicated to Solanka’s own unusual and uncanny theodicy (“The greatness of Akasz Kronos, which was also his downfall, may be judged by this: that the virtues and vices he inculcated in his creations were not wholly, or not only, his own,” 164).

Malik Solanka, “a traveler from an antique land,” (256) ends his journey, in the last chapter of the novel, by coming to terms with his only son, Asmaan, “*lit.* the sky, but also *fig.* paradise.” (9) It is important to notice at this point that the associations and connections to Milton’s *Paradise Lost* are present in Asmaan’s Heath in Kenwood: it

was studded with magical trees. A gigantic fallen oak, its roots twisting in air, was one such enchanted zone. Another tree, with a hole at the base of its trunk, housed a set of storybook creatures, with whom Asmaan carried out ritual dialogues each time he passed this way. A third tree was the home of Winnie-the-Pooh. (257)

Another ironic textual errancy is to be found here: instead of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, for this one seems to be uprooted and free to give blossom as it is impregnated by the air (a possible indirection of Pierre-Félix Guattari’s rhizomes), Malik-Satan finds other magical trees: one curiously inhabited by storybook creatures, and by association, stories themselves, and one housing a storybook creature whose name originates from his having to blow off flies that settled on his nose.^x

My end is my beginning, or, as the allusion to “The Second Coming” would have it, “Solanka’s surprisingly smooth beast, its hour come round at last, was slouching toward Bethlehem to be born,” (225) and Solanka’s end seems to point to history not so much as cyclic, but rather wasted in its *topoi* of departure, not so much as

subjected to cycles, but rather an always-already invaginated *topos*, which is folded-in so that the outer becomes an inner surface. In other words, the fabric of Rushdie's text makes apparent that the story-threads or shreds are not that important, what really counts, in the end, is how he weaves that textual tapestry into a whole new texture.

In sum, the intertextual finale of Rushdie's *Fury* celebrates Milton's *Paradise Lost* in *destinerrance*, celebrates the uncanny fury of the protagonist being re-elaborated as story, celebrates the open-ended *topoi* of history as a means to (de)construct the so-called authority of religion in terms of its history and in view to proclaiming the individual's freedom to lose him or herself, to fall, and to bounce back to life through story-telling: "Look at me, Asmaan! I'm bouncing very well. I'm bouncing higher and higher!" (259) The fury that pursues Solanka is intended to evoke, according to Rushdie, "the genuine anger that exists in the world today," the way that "many people today define themselves by their anger" (2005, p. 562) and, I may add, those people forget to realize that this same anger may lead the individual back to life, for this anger may question and problematize authority and serve as the means to bounce the individual back to the "paradise" that is fiction. Back to Brouillette's critical assessment of *Fury*, we may now assert that, with the help of *destinerrance* and *Paradise Lost*, the novel is about life making its way into fiction and fiction making its way, all too intertextu(ra)lly, back into the world where meaning is made.

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ii Lee Siegel (2001) shows how Saul Bellow's Mr. Sammler's Planet and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* serve as textual inspirations for Rushdie's *Fury*. Justyna Deszcz also shows how *Fury* features numerous fairy-tale intertextualities and allusions. "Among other instances she cites Rushdie's allusions to Prince Charming and the toad, Peter Pan and Captain Hook, characters from Disney's animated movies and from *2001*, and to Swift's imaginary islands of Lilliput and Blefuscus in the first book of *Gulliver's Travels*. Rushdie's use of Swift's fantasy geography serves to draw attention to the way the Lilliput-Blefuscans (Fijians) stand diminished in economic stature in the eyes of the principal global power, America." (Deszcz, 2002)

iii The original epigraph to F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* runs as follows: "Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her; / If you can bounce high, bounce for her too, / Till she cry 'Lover, gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover, / I must have you!'" Thomas Parke D'Invilliers. Curious enough, if thought as an irony intertextually concocted by the author, a 64-year-old Indian-British novelist and essayist, the second paragraph of the novel reads as follows: "for the intimate revelations of young men, or at least the terms in which they express them, are usually plagiaristic and marred by obvious suppressions." (Fitzgerald, 2011)

iv Other important critical receptions of Salman Rushdie's *Fury* can also be found in Chamlou (2000), Gonzalez (2005), Leonard (2005), Mars-Jones (2011), Mondal (2007), Reder (2000), Stephens (2005), and Tonkin (2011).

v All references are to *Fury*, Random edition, 2001, and will come in parenthesis with page number.

vi Parenthetic Book and line references to John Milton's *Paradise Lost* are to the Penguin edition (1977).

vii Here I must not fail to mention that *Fury* shows numerous allusions to Shakespeare and his plays, and that the most ironic of them all is: "What was he [Solanka] thinking of, giving himself and his paltry actions these high Shakespearean airs?" (11) I should also add that the title of William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* refers to a line from William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (2011): "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow/ Creeps in this petty pace from day to day/ To the last syllable of recorded time,/ And all our yesterdays have lighted fools/ The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle./ Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player/ That struts and frets his hour upon the stage./ And then is heard no more. It is a tale/Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/ Signifying nothing." (Act V. scene v.18–27)

viii I should add here that New York is not Solanka's final destination.

ix The myths and philosophies, to cite just a few, are: "himself living in a golden age," (4) "Spinoza who cut our strings," (17) "the future was like an open mouth waiting to devour him as Kronos", (20) "the dour pages of Sarraute, Robbe-Griller, and Butor," (31) "the Pythian games," (43) "the philosophy of the *sanyasi*," (81) "Tisiphone, Alecto, Megaera," (123) "Ghandi performing his *brahmacharya* 'experiments with truth,'" (125) "the Winged Victory of Samothraki," (147) "Solanka quoted Machiavelli. 'Men are less hesitant about harming someone who makes himself lover than one who makes himself feared,'" (245) "the Delphic Oracle ... 'Serpent-haired, dog-

headed, bat-winged.”” (251)

✗ Pooh is used as an interjection expressing disapproval.