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## Love is in the air

### Flying lovers in lyric poetry and iconographic representations

Based on the cultural attractiveness of the connection between love and flight, this paper analyzes various lyrical and iconographic images of flying lovers in the epoch of technical flights within German-speaking culture (from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present) in order to explore the construction of happy love in the air as well as the fragile condition of love which is represented by the ambivalences of the flight dream. The following questions are addressed: What is expected from the vision of flying? Which concepts of love and happiness underlie these visions and what is finally gained by transforming the dream into a 'reality'? What role does the atmosphere as a connection of meteorological and emotional aspects play in the understanding of love? By investigating utopian, atmospheric, organic, mythological, and technical aspects of love flight scenes, this paper provides a contribution to cultural atmospheric research as well as to love studies as an interdisciplinary field.

### 1 Happiness in the air

The dream of flying, of following the birds, of soaring and moving through the air is one of the oldest and most culturally attractive imaginations. This ancient anthropological desire for liberation from gravity or from an insurmountable dependence on the limitations of human nature and everyday reality manifests itself in numerous mythological or religious visions, fairy tale motifs, magical practices, symbolic orders as well as technical experiments (Behringer/ Ott-Koptschalijski 1991). Even though the invention of aircraft is a historical fact, the weightlessness of the human body has not been achieved: what is able to fly are machines and vehicles, not human beings "without apparatus merely with/ outstretched arms"<sup>1</sup> (Hartung 2005: 57). The old dream remains unfulfilled, but it is important to note that flying has never been imagined as "the epitome of luxury, speed or distance transport" (Macho 2003: 331), but rather as a wishful image of freedom, spirituality, and eroticism<sup>2</sup> – a vision which involves a risk of falling to the earth because the flying subject "moves in the vertical: between the sky and the abyss" (Macho 2003: 331). The metaphor of flight touches on the most important, anthropologically grounded, existential themes, above all freedom, transcendence, and immortality. It articulates not only the dream of an unleashed movement but also a need for mobility in a certain direction, namely heavenward – and, therefore, implies the hope of happiness.

The weightlessness, or the eternal dream of not being bound to time and space, passages between high and low worlds, but also the constant danger of falling are important parts of modernity which permanently tries to explore the possibilities and limits of the feasible. Flight imaginations and imagined flights, or the more or less harmonious air space, as they are created in literature and art, are reminiscent not only of high-flying modern projects and plans but also of movement imaginations (Bachelard 2011) in the sense of utopian thinking. Utopia is indeed a space of possibility, a projected ideal place, which, as Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 99–100) aptly formulate, "does not split off from infinite movement: etymologically it stands

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<sup>1</sup> "ohne Apparat bloß mit/ ausgebreiteten Armen". Unless otherwise noted, all translations from German in this article are my own.

<sup>2</sup> The tradition of erotic implications in the depictions of flight has been addressed in past research, for example, Hart (1997) and Behringer/ Ott-Koptschalijski (1991: 73–76)

for absolute deterritorialization, but always at the critical point at which it is connected with the present relative milieu, and especially with the forces that stifle that milieu". In addition to the spatial fantasies of lightness, happiness, salvation, the air in many cultural texts is not necessarily a space "without qualities" ("ohne Eigenschaften") – meaning that the air space is not free of any connotations of social provenance such as distinctions, positions, and hierarchies, which are specific for social and historical structures or spatiotemporal coordinates.

The tradition of utopian thinking refers to one of the oldest and culturally most attractive imaginations – the idea that people can take to the skies in order to unite with the distant object of their love as quickly as possible or the image of flying lovers searching for a hideaway far from their living world. The visual history from Eros as the winged god of love as well as many artistic representations of flying couples from the fresco *Couple in Flight* from Pompeii to the art of the Renaissance, and the famous paintings by Marc Chagall such as *Over the Town* (1915) or *The Birthday* (1915), bear witness to the long history of the cultural attractiveness of the connection between love and flight. The magical potency of love, which itself has wings and gives wings to lovers, is a widespread literary and iconographic motif that goes hand in hand with the belief in overcoming all kinds of obstacles in order to fulfill the most ardent of desires: happiness in love. It is imagined as a *locus amoenus* in placelessness and timelessness, removed from the heaviness of earth, freed from the burden of discursive attributions in cultural realities. The Polish philosopher Krzysztof Michalski (2007: 201–202) gets to the heart of the matter when he characterizes a paradigmatic pair of lovers in his essay *Wieczna miłość* (Eternal love): "they lose their place and date, they lose their weight", "they leave the ground to fly in an empty sky, where you cannot know which way is up and which is down, what is right and what is left"; at the same time "they are still here, they stay here and now". In the spirit of this utopian philosophy of love and the concepts of atmosphere developed within the framework of non-representational methodologies (Vannini 2015), I will attempt to analyze some lyrical and iconographic images of flying lovers in the epoch of the technical realization of the flight dream within German-speaking culture, from the beginning of the 20th century to the present. The following questions are addressed: What is expected from the vision of flying? Which concepts of love and happiness underlie these visions and what is finally gained by transforming the dream into 'reality'? What role does the atmosphere as a connection of meteorological and emotional aspects play in the understanding of love?

Thereby, the phenomenological challenge is worth facing, according to which love could be conceptualized as a spatially poured atmosphere (Schmitz 1993) described with different meaningful metaphors such as heat, flame, weight, airiness, lightness, or a floating attitude. Furthermore, the imaginations of flying lovers, who entrust themselves to the air and the forces of nature, perform certain functions in socio-cultural interpretation systems of different emotional cultures and are connected with the rules of social spaces as well as with the time-related concepts of love and cultural repressions. The lovers looking for a space of happiness always pursue the dream of "discovering their togetherness as something different from the world of others, the world below" (Matt 1991: 83). Sometimes, the utopia of the exterritorial status of the flying love couple – the "heaven of the lovers" (M. Chagall)<sup>3</sup> or "cloud

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Chagall's graphic *Le ciel des amoureux* (1962).

balconies" for lovers (Ausländer 1984: 44)<sup>4</sup> – is problematized, not least because it is difficult to overcome the experienced reality or socially structured and gendered hierarchies, relationships, distinctions, and exclusion processes which infect the exclusive space of mobility. Therefore, it seems appropriate not only to ask the question about the things and relationships involved but also to look more closely at the gendering of air space and to examine whether literary texts and pictorial representations of flying lovers manifest a female affinity for the element of air, while the privileged position of 'bird's-eye view' and the flight as a technical adventure remain mostly a male domain. The ontological-gender evaluation of air against Heidegger's paradigm of the earth as the ground of life, which is at the center of Luce Irigaray's "philosophy of breathing" (Irigaray 1999: 3), provides important arguments for the discussion on the association of air with womanhood as well as on considering the air as a milieu in which an encounter with the other is possible. It must also be remembered that the construction of utopian air spaces of love often leads to disillusionment, which is expressed in the following passage from the novel *Sońka* (2014: 143) by the Polish writer Ignacy Karłowicz: "No love ends up in heaven, only on the earth. The earth."<sup>5</sup>

## 2 Meteorological aura

The term *atmosphere*, deriving from the Greek *atmos* and *sphaira* (vapor, steam and ball, globe) refers to something that surrounds and envelops human and non-human beings. Even if atmospheres are difficult to comprehend and manage, they act as an invisible force, sometimes a seductive patina of things, or the quality of air, and determine our relationship with the world (Tellenbach 1968: 61). Therefore, one of the most important analytical categories within the research of atmospheres in cultural texts is the corporeality of experience, which refers to the subject and emphasizes the affective significance of each world encounter as a confrontation with different atmospheric dimensions of space, which can cause certain consequences. Nobody leaves a place as they found it because the associative "charging" of the space "expands, complicates, eroticizes the place of departure, establishes it for us, creating the conditions for communication with others" (Blum 2018: 43). Atmospheres are considered largely non-representational total phenomena, as affective and meteorological "elemental spacetimes," "whose force and variation can be felt, sometimes only barely, in bodies of different kinds" (McCormack 2018: 4). They are formed by movements of air as well as constellations of things and humans, and thus they provide a basis for investigations of spaces, moods, feelings, relationships, and their dynamics. The combination of atmospheres with the aura of homeland and foreign spaces (Hauskeller 1995: 73–76) as well as the utopian dimension of the air space create an array of problems that has received little attention in research so far and provokes reflection on important aspects of the human condition and being-in-the-world, even beyond created and controlled social constructions and cultural discourses. It seems especially interesting to focus on images of flying lovers under consideration of material and atmospheric conditions in the sense of the "totality of air space" (Böhme 2011: 155). The anthropological relevance of this problem can be expressed in Rose Ausländer's (1986: 163) poetic image of flying, love, and kiss ("Wir lieben einander/ küssen uns/ und halten/ den

<sup>4</sup> "Wolkenbalkone/ im Flug liebt/ der Bräutigam/ die Braut".

<sup>5</sup> "Żadna miłość nie ląduje w niebie, zawsze ziemia. Ziemia."

Himmel hoch") as well as in the succinct description of the world in which it occurs: "Sie ist aus Luft und Liebe." The utopian alternative to everyday life and work as a connection of flight and love with the perspective of eternity also finds its way into the poem *Nur die Liebe* (Only Love): "Nur der Flug/ berechtigt mein Herz/ zu schlagen/ Nur der Gedanke der Ewigkeit/ unterstützt mein Atem/ Nur die Liebe/ erlaubt mir/ ein Mensch zu sein" (Ausländer 1991: 47). Love appears in Ausländer's poems as spherically extended, omnipresent, not personalized – it is quasi in the air. This dreamlike notion corresponds to the thesis of the phenomenological theory of emotions, according to which feelings are to be understood as spatially poured ("räumlich ergossen"), disseminated, and non-localizable atmospheres. Love is one of these feelings, which are "armed" with strong authority (Schmitz 1993: 64) and "haunt a body that they embed in the manner of affective involvement" (Schmitz 1969: 343).<sup>6</sup>

In several poems, the love flight is staged in an atmospheric staffage, which is accompanied by a promise of happiness. The vision of an infinite opening of space, of being able to appropriate even the entire globe, is evoked in Richard Dehmel's poem *Erhebung* (Elevation) from the volume *Weib und Welt* (Woman and World), which was published in 1896, in the broad cultural context of flight experiments. Elevation appears possible when the lyrical narrator takes the apostrophized person's hand or just one finger. Then, they form a physical connection, an organism, so to speak, that can rise up and see the land ("my land") from above: "O, wie blüht mein Land,/ sieh dir's doch nur an!/ daß es mit uns über die Wolken/ in die Sonne kann!" (Dehmel 1896: 126). The lyrical ego thus wishes to leave the world in order to reach the sphere of sun and clouds, but their country should accompany the couple – possibly because it seems much more beautiful from above than in the reality on earth. And above the earth, an affective experience is possible, which appears "beyond, around, and alongside the formation of subjectivity" (Anderson 2009: 77), but at the same time, the atmosphere can be felt as intensely personal. Nevertheless, the only motivation for the flight that the text reveals seems to be the longing for the sun and the pure desire to rise – obviously associated with happiness.

In Else Lasker-Schüler's poem *Liebesflug* (Flight of Love, 1905) the speaking subject, probably female, confesses her love for a man and compares her screaming lips to the "opening mouth of the earth" ("der geöffnete Erdmund"). The flight itself, taking place in the May rain, is described as follows: "Und wir griffen unsere Hände./ Die verlöteten wie Ringe sich./ Und er sprang mit mir auf die Lüfte/ Gott hin, bis der Atem verstrich" (Lasker-Schüler 1996: 76). Fantasies of growing together also appear in this poem, however, they allude to wedding rings and thus refer to the laws of social space. A type of movement is poetically drawn, which is expressed in a very original way: the couple leaps on the winds ("auf die Lüfte"), though the man plays the accompanying role ("er sprang mit mir"). The direction of the breathtaking flight is not only upwards but also godwards ("gotthin"), which is the next beautiful poetic image. The lovers' flight adventure is followed by a bright summer's day, on which the girls gaze rapturously, but the speaking subject finds some reasons to lament: "Nur meine Seele lag müd und zag" (Lasker-Schüler 1996: 76). This seems like a post-ecstatic state after returning to earth. Even if the atmosphere has an extremely positive effect on others, the lyrical subject is

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<sup>6</sup> Hermann Schmitz introduced the term *atmospheres* into philosophy in the 1960s and defined them as spatially extended, non-subjective feelings – a kind of external force that grips the felt body. His intention is "to ascribe to feelings an independent reality, which can be characterized by its spatiality, corporeality, and binding force" (Ferran 2011: 250).

concerned and hesitant, as it has certain memories that make it possible to compare earthly life with the space in the air. Therefore, it may be resistant to the effects of the environment, or the transmission of others' affects (Brennan 2004). Lasker-Schüler's poem *Erfüllung* (Fulfillment, 1905), which begins with the image of sad lovers sitting hand in hand, also shows that happiness can be sought outside of earth. In the face of a sunflower that "shines" away from the earth ("erdabgewandt") they suddenly feel yearning. Their hands close "like roses" and they want to turn their love to be more like "young heavens": "Und was werden wir beide spielen.../ Wir halten uns jauchzend umschlungen/ Und kugeln uns über die Erde/ Über die Erde" (Lasker-Schüler 1996: 89).

The construction of happy love is traditionally combined with imagined or utopian spaces of experience – topographies of seclusion and eternity that isolate the lovers in a *locus amoenus* from the world as a *locus terribilis* full of obstacles and adversities. The clouds offer such a safe place, even if they are fleeting and exposed to unpredictable wind forces. In the poem by Else Lasker-Schüler *Mich führte in die Wolke* (Led me into the cloud, 1943), the cloud represents the idea of happiness withdrawn from earthly concerns: "Mich führte in die Wolke mein Geschick/ Wir teilten säumerisch ein erdentschwertes Glück" (Lasker-Schüler 2004: 481). Lamentably, the July sky used to be the object of longing and one could soar with the birds only for a limited time: before the huge catastrophe ("Bevor die Welt brach das Genick"). Meteorological aspects are also touched on by Renate Schoof's poem *Im Aufwind* (Rising in the Wind, 2001), which creates an all-encompassing atmosphere of weightlessness. Balloons float leisurely in the blue sky, dandelions make the air visible, there is neither heaviness of rain clouds nor of donkeys on the earth, even the heaviness of tired feet after a journey has disappeared. A "mad" cloud in the sky represents love: "Verrückte Wolke lacht/ leicht vor Liebe/ leicht vom Wein/ leicht von der Anmut eines Gedankens" (Schoof 2001: 29). The madness and laughter of cloud/ love can be interpreted in different ways. The cloud may be laughing at the heaviness of earthly existence and the difficulties in fulfilling the love dream, not least at the cultural and discursive attributions and expectations in the sense of 'gravitational' forces. On the other hand, being light also signifies the possibility and ability to evaporate, to be blown away. 'Gone with the wind' can undoubtedly be the fate of love in the poetic universe, not only metaphorically but also indeed atmospherically. Renate Schoof wrote a poem about a flight over the sea, in which she draws on mythological motifs. The female lyrical subject addresses a male love object and asks: "Wenn wir die großen Spiele spielen/ dann laß mich nicht Delila sein/ sei du nicht Jason/ nicht Theseus/ und laß mich nicht/ von deiner Wolke stürzen/ in den Hellespont" (Schoof 2001: 71). Expecting her partner to discard the male heroic burden ("das Geld der Philister", "das Goldene Fließ") and to join her in the space of water and air instead, she poetically proclaims: "wir brauchen Leben, Liebe/dein schönes Haar und freies Geleit". The images of the ship, the ride on the Minotaur, and the flight over the sea are connected with the couple's being together and with love – "bis uns die Erde wieder erreicht".

Air and water also often appear in visual representations as a backdrop for the couple in love. Such a constellation is shown in Wolfgang Mattheuer's picture *Schwebendes Liebespaar* (Floating Lovers, 1970). It depicts two intertwined bodies against the background of sand, water, and sky, isolated in their intimate space and caressing each other, flying over the sea and the beach, but in such a way that the woman leans on the man so as not to lose her footing. She hangs on the man with her eyes closed and a blissful facial expression that reflects her sense of security

and happiness. As early as 1964, Mattheuer created a variation on the theme of flying lovers – the picture *Liebespaar* (Lovers), in which the couple is floating in the air, leaving the crescent moon beneath them. They are no longer part of their daily world but have been transferred to a space of love and happiness. Max Klinger's *Die Sehnsucht. Fliegendes Paar* (The Longing. Flying Couple, 1909) shows a couple emanating their passion, flying over a seascape, against the background of clouds. The man is dressed in black – his robe gives the impression of wings; the woman is naked and captivates with the white color of her body. The man takes the navigating role while the woman is clinging to him. The flight into the distant unknown represents an indefinite longing, probably for a fantastic space of free love. Both of Heinrich Wägenbaur's lovers float asleep in nocturnal flight over the city (*Schwebend-schlafendes Liebespaar über der Stadt*, Floating-sleeping lovers over the city, 1963), whereby the female body is comfortably bedded on the male one and is carried by him. Paul Kämmerer's painting *Paar in Landschaft* (Couple in Landscape, 1910) shows a naked couple floating in a vertical position in an idyllic landscape, holding hands and looking at each other lovingly. A haze forms around the couple, delineating their common space, and surrounding their intimacy, which is characterized by a visible blue brightness. This marks their air and their piece of sky. In Helmut Kies' etching *Fliegendes Paar mit Ballon* (Flying couple with balloon, 1965) a couple float in the air next to a balloon – carefree, naked, enjoying each other. The man holds the female body, and she seems to be connected to the cloud through her hair and hands. Ernst Barlach's drawing *Liebespaar* (Lovers, 1924) shows two lovers embracing each other while standing. However, their body positions are not characteristic of people who stand firmly on the ground. Rather, they already seem to be taking off, as if they wanted to forget everything in their intimate togetherness in order to just indulge in love. Rudolf Schlichter's *Schwebendes Liebespaar* (Floating Lovers, circa 1913) shows two naked bodies in an intimate embrace, kissing one another, rising into the air probably in search of undisturbed zones of privacy. The air itself is visible through the small organic elements surrounding the couple. Bele Bachem's floating couple (*Schwebendes Paar*, 1983) flies positioned above each other – the man above the woman. It is similar in Günter Tiedeken's painting *Fliegendes Paar* (Flying Couple, 1986) – here a fused couple flies in a loving embrace. All these lovers take leave of Earth and soar upwards in search of an alternative space of intimacy. The weightless fluidity creates an atmosphere of lightness and sensuality, in which the floating bodies radiate some kind of erotic aura. The man and woman are devoted to each other, forming configurations in which spatial relationships play a role without reproducing conflicts or power relations associated with love and sexuality in social spaces of emotional regimes. Power is not iconographically staged. There is "little earth" ("wenig Erde") in the heights, there is more space, and there is freedom (Bachmann 1993: 314). The pictures of flying lovers merged in their weightlessness capture a safe moment of being at the source of love and comfort, a moment of undisturbed intimacy. They show flying lovers in their "seventh heaven".

### 3 Like a bird

Reflecting on the images of flying lovers in German poetry, we necessarily come across the old and famous folksong: "Wenn ich ein Vöglein wär'/ Und auch zwei

Flügel hätt' / Flög' ich zu dir; / Weil es aber nicht kann sein, / Bleib ich allhier."<sup>7</sup> The fantasy of emulating the birds and taking to the skies to reconnect with a loved one appears again and again, even in the era of high-speed technical flights.<sup>8</sup> According to Böhme, atmospheres are "spaces insofar as they are *tinctured* through the presence of things, of persons or environmental constellations, that is, through their ecstasies" (Böhme 1993: 121, emphasis in original). The ecstasy is the form of things that radiates, takes away the homogeneity of the surrounding space, and fills it with tension and suggestion of movement. Considering the atmosphere as a constellation of different elements in a particular environment makes evident its non-human dimension. This dimension may be represented by birds as figures of the human desire for attributes belonging to creatures flying through the air or at least for getting help from them.

In one of Else Lasker-Schüler's poems, the lyrical subject is sorrowful (the dark clouds represent this state) and turns to the beloved ("du Holdester"). The need to call out the name of the beloved with the voice of a bird of paradise appears. All the trees in the garden are already asleep, but organic nature does not abandon the lyrical speaker: "Es rauscht der Flügel des Geiers/ Und trägt mich durch die Lüfte/ Bis über dein Haus" (Lasker-Schüler 2020: 92). The wings of the bird make the rapid union of the lovers and a fusion of their bodies possible: "Meine Arme legen sich um deine Hüften,/ Mich zu spiegeln/ In deines Leibes Verklärtheit" (Lasker-Schüler 2020: 92). It is a happy moment accompanied by the hope that love will not be extinguished but will last indeed. The desire to join the birds and wind is also expressed in other poems by this poet, especially in situations of sadness or contemplation (the state of sadness is represented by the moon): "Immer möchte ich auffliegen,/ Mit den Zugvögeln fort/ Buntatmen mit den Winden/ In der großen Luft" (Lasker-Schüler 1917: 126). The infinite air sphere of the skies ("große Luft") is praised as a space of longing, although human beings in the poetic universe are obviously not always endowed with the ability to fly. The lyrical subject has "broken wings" associated with an unhappy moment in the love experience.<sup>9</sup> Plants and birds shared the mood of dejection,<sup>10</sup> but now the atmosphere of jubilation dominates again.<sup>11</sup> "Und ich möchte auffliegen/ Mit den Zugvögeln fort" (Lasker-Schüler 1917: 126). To fly up with the migrating birds would be a spectacular excess of movement and an opportunity to feel the blurred boundary between humans and birds, present and future, the inner and outer world. Birds as figures of desire are depicted in many poems, and – often together with clouds – occasionally mark unreachable zones of happiness, as with the birds of longing (Sehnsuchtsvogel) in Ernst Stadler's poem *Glück* (Happiness), written before 1914. These birds have flown away and even clouds no longer seduce the lyrical subject to fly in distant lands: "Ich schaue still den Wolken zu,/ die über meinem Fenster in die Bläue jagen –/ sie locken nicht mehr,/ mich zu fernen Küsten fortzutragen,/ Wie einst, da Sterne,

<sup>7</sup> Text and music anonymous, distributed in various versions before 1778, included in Johann Gottfried Herder's *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* (Erstes Buch Nr. 12).

<sup>8</sup> The image of the love flight like a bird is not reserved for poetry, but also appears in prose, for example, in Hans Ortheil's novel *Liebesnähe* (Love's Closeness, 2011): "Sie richtet sich auf, nimmt einen großen Schluck Wasser und breitet sich dann weit über ihm aus, sie ist jetzt ein Vogel mit großen Schwingen, der seinen Leib zu fassen bekommt und mit ihm davonfliegt. Nach langem, schönem Flug über die weißen Inseln werden sie irgendwo landen, wo sie endlich allein sind und keine aufdringlichen Laute sie mehr erreichen" (Ortheil 2013: 391).

<sup>9</sup> "Als an deinem steinernen Herzen/ Meine Flügel brachen [...]" (Lasker-Schüler 2017: 126).

<sup>10</sup> "Fielen die Amsel wie Trauerrosen/ Hoch vom blauen Gebüsch" (Lasker-Schüler 2017: 126).

<sup>11</sup> "Alles verhaltene Gezwitscher/ Will wieder jubeln [...]" (Lasker-Schüler 2017: 126).

Wind und Sonne/ wehrlos mich ins Weite zogen" (Stadler 2008: 82). However, love forms a cloak in which the lyrical subject is enveloped, descending like a bird into the chamber of happiness: "Ganz tief in mir, so wie ein Vogel,/ der ins flaumige Gefieder/ Zu sommerdunklem Traum/ das Köpfchen niederdrückt" (Stadler 2008: 82). Happiness is thus achieved without the ability to fly, but not entirely without ornithological analogies.

One of the best-known modern examples of the association of lovers with birds is Bertolt Brecht's poem *Die Liebenden* (The Lovers, 1931) which has been interpreted several times. Cranes, flying side by side, at the same height and with the same haste, melted in love unity, share "the space of the wide skies" with the clouds, and are only carried by the wind. The wind also rocks the clouds back and forth in their air-like instability. This seemingly intimate togetherness in the air is a juxtaposition, a kind of lying next to each other in movement in an indeterminate direction, without a destination or into the void: "So mag der Wind sie in das Nichts entführen" (Brecht 1960: 210). But they are still flying, totally in love with each other, in a state of exception, beyond all social ties, safe from the dangers of those places where "Regen drohen oder Schüsse fallen". They symbolically represent people in love, who are never located and find a mobile refuge in the air, notwithstanding their seclusion under the clouds being only ephemeral: "Ihr fragt, wie lange sind sie schon beisammen?/ Seit kurzem. – Und wann werden sie sich trennen? – Bald./ So scheint die Liebe Liebenden ein Halt" (Brecht 1960: 210). Of course, the cranes, which show themselves more and more as lovers, are reminiscent of the infernal flight of the illicit couple Francesca and Paolo. But what "is factually given in Dante through the myth of hell: the everlasting is adopted in Brecht as the experience that the lovers have as long as they are lovers" (Von Matt 1991: 89). Brecht's introduction of the perspective of time creates the impression of a critical view on the myth of eternal love since it only seems as if love were timeless and offered a feeling of security. Nevertheless, the poetic image of drifting in the wind – "a swaying, an experience of peace in movement" (Müller/ Kindt 2002: 95) – goes beyond a "parodic exposure of a great scene of European love culture" (Von Matt 1991: 90). It is probably one of the most famous poetic moments of happy floating, even if the vision is rather vague, not even the gender of the cranes is known, only that they are flying side by side. The image represents the desire to depart from the drudgeries of earthbound realities and – as Brecht researchers have repeatedly emphasized – poetically adheres to the metaphysical idea or the mystical experience of love (Müller/ Kindt 2002: 98) high in the skies, beneath the clouds.

The fantasy of being a bird and flying up with the beloved occasionally appears in situations of crises or troubles and is associated with a search for alternative love spaces. The song by Konstantin Wecker *Flieg oder stirb* (Fly or die, 1976) articulates the elementary desire to share with the birds their condition to fly as well as their space: "Vogel sein. Weit drüber weg fliegen" (Wecker 1981: 116). The desired ornithological anatomy would allow for entirely new excesses of mobility and unification with atmospheric forces, meaning: "Krallen haben. Und sich in den Wind haken./ Flügel schlagen, reiten durch die Luft" (Wecker 1981: 116). It is an organic imagination that refers to cultural traditions of (male) movement and includes taking the beloved along ("dich, dich irgendeinmal mitnehmen"): flying like riding on horseback. Provided the interpretation of the "du" as a beloved, the scene is accompanied by typical cultural love images such as high temperatures of desire, becoming fire, burning together ("Feuer werden. Brennen mit dir.") and endlessly soaring



together at high speed – without any localizing perspective. In this infinity, there are not two loves crossing each other, not two flames burning side by side, but there is one fire, one love (Ferran 2011:254). The poem evokes an ecstatic mood that is atmospherically, emotionally, and culturally marked. One of the reasons for the love flight project is undoubtedly the fact that the land has become too heavy, and the ensuring choice has to be made: to fly or to die. The decision made is to follow in the footsteps of Icarus:<sup>12</sup> strong, wide wings that will never melt in the sun. Poetic visions of flight are characterized not only by organic and mythological associations but also by technical ones. In this sense, Zehra Çirak stages the flight of Karl and Karla, who run to the airfield and wait until permission is granted:

dann strecken sich vier Arme/ vier Arme und davon zwei/ die nicht durch Körper verbunden sind/ berühren sich/ die zwei im Leeren beginnen zu kreisen/ sie schaufeln Luft und atmen tief/ beim Gesetz der Leichtigkeit/ fallen vier Arme/ zwei Köpfe heben sich/ Karl und Karla beim Fliegen/ und doch (Çirak 1994: 103).

This scene is presented in the context of the airfield and fear of flying, yet it seems as if the two assume a bird's pose and arrange their bodies accordingly. The excess called "Karl and Karla flying" presents itself as spectacular, extraordinary, almost fantastic, but at the same time doubts arise in relation to this project, indicated by the formula "and yet". Perhaps this is because the poem does not speak of well-meaning atmospheric forces or of being like a bird as preconditions for flight. It might be that the couple is not really united by the fantastic power of love that can transcend all boundaries.

#### 4 Air, dreams, and delusions

Gaston Bachelard emphasizes the connection between dreaming, flying, and love, which has an axiomatic significance for cultural imagination: "The dream of flight is the dream of a *seductive* seducer. Love and its images cluster around this theme. By studying it we see how love *produces* images." (Bachelard 2011: 20; emphasis in original). This dynamic imagination creates primordial beauty and happiness. The idea is that "we can rise *naturally* toward the sky, with the wind, with a breath of air, carried *directly* by our feeling of ineffable happiness" (Bachelard 2011: 33; emphasis in original). The air offers refuge and promises to fulfill dreams. It is a space of utopia not least in the meaning of the "place outside all places", where a body "without a body" would be possible: "beautiful, limpid, transparent, luminous, speedy, colossal in its power, infinite in duration" (Foucault 2006: 229). The aerial motion seems to be a special kind of movement, connected to nocturnal activity in the form of oneiric levitation, "which is more profound, more essential, less complicated psychic reality than love itself" (Bachelard 2011: 35). On the one hand poetry creates dream scenes of an untroubled utopian flight, but on the other hand, it can also problematize the idealized concept.

The aerial hopes are sometimes merely hinted at, only evoked, and left open. There are occasionally poetic speculations about the origin of dreams of flying – as in Doris Runge's poem *Fliegen* (Flying, 1985): "meine flügel ließ ich dir/ du rupfst sie/ für unser daunenbett/ nun träume ich nachts/ vom fliegen" (Runge 1990: 87).

<sup>12</sup> Uli Becker's *Schwingen zwei sich empor* is a praise of flying in pairs as more beautiful than flying by oneself using the Icarus method, "weil man ja nicht flattern muss, seine Hände frei für andres hat, dolle Nummer" (Becker 1990: 137).

This is a striking image of an organic-magical transmission that illustrates a difference between the two subjects in their attitude towards flying ("I gave you my wings") and saves the dream in any case ("now I dream of flying at night"). Poems also stage symbiotic unions of lovers pursuing a common dream. Zehra Çirak's title poem of the volume *Fremde Flügel auf eigener Schulter* (Foreign wings on my own shoulder, 1994) shows a couple that have long been united on earth ("auf festem Boden"): the man is right-handed, the woman is left-handed and their dream of flying seems self-evident: "du hast einen Flügel auf deiner linken Schulter/ und ich natürlich einen auf meiner rechten/ so beim gemeinsamen Schwingen wünschen wir/ Schulter an Schulter verwachsen/ abzuheben" (Çirak 1994: 98).<sup>13</sup> This reverie illuminates how complicated and insecure the symbiosis or how unsafe the intimate embrace can be while flying, especially with "foreign wings". Even the relational arrangement of the lovers ("verwachsen") cannot protect them against the danger of losing physical contact ("in den Lüften dort könnten wir/ uns zerreißen"). There is no poetic speculation about the causes of the danger – they are left to the readers' imagination. One can imagine that the flying couple has to struggle against various obstacles such as air movement (wind) and air temperature (heat/ cold), unstable meteorological formations, and disorientation. That is why they "reliably" hold their hands – "und kratzen uns allabendlich/ gegenseitig die juckenden Schulterblätter" (Çirak 1994: 98). Whether they really grow wings remains an open perspective. However, according to Bachelard: "when a wing appears in an account of a dream of light, we must suspect that the account has been rationalized" (Bachelard 2011: 27, emphasis in original).

Poetry also shows individual aerial dreamers who do not share their visions of rising into the air with their lovers. The lyrical subject in Joachim Ringelnatz's poem *Wandle träumend jeder für sich* (Everyone should dream for himself, 1910) floats in heights ("in himmlischen Fernen") under clouds ("im rosigen Wolkengehänge"), where angels greet him. With his oneiric wings, he believes himself to be in the sphere of happiness with a very sensual mood: "Und auf weißem Schwanengefieder,/ Weich gebettet, fand ich mich wieder,/ Dort, wo die Träumenden glücklich sind" (Ringelnatz 1910: 9). But his "girl" did not accompany him in his imaginary levitation in the atmosphere of enjoyment, tenderness, and delicacy, enriched with the fragrant billowing of the wind. She asks where he was after he wakes up. The answer "I was thinking about you" is a lie and leads to the conclusion about separate dream worlds: "Everyone should dream for himself" (Ringelnatz 1910: 9).<sup>14</sup> A separation, combined with an inability or unwillingness to fly or to love is the subject of numerous poems. In Renate Schoof's *Altes Lied* (2001), a woman celebrates a festival of love and praises her lover, who is the most beautiful and cleverest of all ("Ich lache und tanze die Hälfte der Nacht" (Schoof 2001: 85)). But he wears stars and feathers in his hair and does not recognize her as his beloved, he leaves her alone on earth. Another constellation with the male inability to love shows an untitled poem by Maria Magdalena Leonhard from 1978, which places the man in the

<sup>13</sup> Schoof's poem *Symbiotisch* also depicts a winged symbiosis, namely a four-winged human couple: "Vierflügeliges Menschenpaar/ kann nicht gehen/ mit seinen vier Beinen/ hat Angst/ vor vier greifenden Armen/ und/ zwei erschöpfte Gesichter" (Schoof 2001: 76).

<sup>14</sup> In a later poem with the significant title *Einsamer Spazierflug* from the volume *Flugzeuggedanken* (1929), this story is perhaps continued: The speaking I has already died and flies as an angel over the house of his wife, who may be courted as a widow. He wants to know how she is, whether she is happy or complaining. And should she cry, he would try to land with her: "Kippte ich die Maschine kurz/ Steil ab auf Sturz" (Ringelnatz 1997: 366).

tradition of Icarus. Woman's love is compared to the sun ("die reift und versengt"), and the man – imagined on the side of the cold in cultural conceptions of love – is afraid of flying too close to the sun: "Du aber/ Ikarus/ fürchtest/ um Deine wächsernen Flügel" (Leonhard 1998: 169). It is a story not only about the male fear of the bonds of love but also about the affinity for technical projects that bring fame and a place in the history of civilization. They are worth the sacrifice of losing wings or even death.

There is one famous iconographic motif that illustrates the problematization of the affinity between love, happiness, and the air, which is thematized in many poems. It is the old image of the bride of the wind, shown in the famous work by Oskar Kokoschka, *Die Windsbraut* (The Bride of the Wind, 1913).<sup>15</sup> The artist himself and his beloved Alma Mahler, at that time the wife of the composer Gustav Mahler, became the prototypes of the characters depicted – a lot has already been written about this passionate love and its artistic processing. We can see two lovers lying side by side in a desperate, relatively distant embrace, without any eye contact. While the woman appears to be asleep, the man – looking like a skeleton – is gazing into the blueness of the space, symbolizing darkness, sadness, and despair. The two have apparently not been lifted from the ground by the power of love, they are rather carried by strong waves of wind, which creates an atmosphere of anxiety, vanity, and sadness and illustrates the fragile nature of love. The wind does not appear here as a "heavenly child" (Cartier 2014) or a gentle "heaven's breath" (Watson 1984) but is visible in the form of threatening vortices. The bride is associated with stormy weather, she belongs to the wind<sup>16</sup> and can be blown away at any time. The elements of wind and love form a danger for the male figure floating with the bride of the wind. Anyway, the imagined idyll of lovers in the midst of the stormy ocean appears questionable and threatened. The wind seems to express that nothing is safe anymore; even when airborne, the lovers cannot feel themselves in protecting arms. The hurricane of passion involves turbulences, cold fronts, and gusts of wind – just as in cultural realities of love and emotional regimes in the social world.

The next aspect of the problem to be analyzed is connected with the meaningful and symbolic triad of flying – floating – falling and illustrates, particularly clearly, the ambivalences of the flight dream, which is repeatedly shown and reflected as an integration of liberation momentum and suffering or failure. Love flight is not always safe, it is rather an ambivalent project, accompanied by the fear of falling, as a poem by Konstantin Wecker with the same title shows. The speaking subject dreams of traveling on wings and turns to a You (it may be love itself) with the proposal to fly along. The flight goes "die Zeit entzwei" and requires ecstasy as well as witchcraft. The impression of freedom appears as a kind of self-deception because an abyss opens, the love that sits in the back becomes heavy and the project fails. "So kann das Fliegen niemals glücken" (Wecker 1981: 269). The formula "I am falling" expresses the impossibility of free love. The law of gravity also prevails in Zehra Çiraks *Geh-Hilfe* (1994) and is expressed in the avowal: "Wir fliegen nicht

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<sup>15</sup> The word *Windsbraut* is attested to as early as the 8th century and expresses the ancient idea of the whirlwind as a female force. The motif enjoys great popularity in art and appears for example in the works of Ernst Barlach, Max Ernst, Hann Trier, and Anselm Kiefer as well as in popular culture. In Patrick Swayze's song *She's like the wind* (1987), the woman is compared to the wind that blows around and through the man ("through my tree"). He has to confess that he is not capable of this feminine form of presence: "You're out of my league".

<sup>16</sup> The power of wind can be associated with femininity, seduction, and devouring pull (Voss 2019: 110–112).

wir fallen/ uns in die Arme/ und weil wir uns ständig gegenseitig/ auf die Füße treten/ entgehen wir uns nicht" (Çirak 1994: 100–101). Walking, which stands for a certain emotional maturity, functions here as a necessary condition for a successful love flight. There is a need for fresh air between the lovers ("Luftraum zwischen uns"), otherwise, the couple is not able to fly.

Last but not least, the poetry thematizes a complaint that the dream of flight cannot be realized. The fantasy of flying together is played out from a male perspective in Hans-Ulrich Treichel's poem *Ich gäb dir alles* (I would give you everything, 2009): "Am liebsten flög mit dir fort/ (Hab Blei im Schuh)/ Und zeigte dir mein Königreich/ (Wo liegt es nur)" (Treichel 2009: 55). As an "old and bold" man, the lyrical subject could sing his most beautiful song of "love, faithfulness, and eternity", however, he is speechless and heavy with the burdens of the "earthly" factors – no longer capable of flying, or it is too late to dare it. He can talk about his love dreams only in subjunctive forms. The perspective of the love flight is also problematized in Helga M. Novak's poem *kann nicht steigen nicht fallen* (cannot rise, cannot fall, 1978), in that the lyrical subject has forgotten how to fly: "kann nicht steigen nicht fallen/ flügelahm/ sitze ich da und brüte/ Liebeserklärungen aus" (Novak 1978: 34). Maybe this is supposed to be a love letter? And then the speaking person, staying in the ground-level reality, reveals themselves to be a coot (belonging to the group of crane birds) and creates a comparison with other birds that never detach themselves from the ground. Being a coot means being attached to the element of water and looking for their loved one, who got tangled in the reeds because of its lush black hair. The dazzling question of the gender of the couple must remain open, even if some interpretations clearly suggest that it is the woman who "today" gives herself as a coot, and the man (not a bird at all) who is possibly waiting in the reeds to be freed (Hartmann 2003). The end of the poem perhaps points to an underlying problematic history: "denk bloß nicht ich mache dich los" (Novak 1978: 34). In Jürgen Becker's *Abends, ich rufe dich an* (Evening, I call you, 1979) nothing is promised, attempts are being made, the distance between the lovers is great, and the waiting time seems eternal. The future of the relationship remains uncertain. The poem offers a summary of the problematic status of the love flight, including the hopes or illusions that are put in the air: "vielleicht ein Ballon und ich steige, oder, es ist eine Täuschung der Luft, /keine Bewegung" (Becker 1979: 9). Despite all the dynamizing imaginations, the atmosphere seems to have no affinity with the air of heaven, it means rather a deception or a delusion and refers to the earth.

## 5 Conclusions

In many cultural texts, the air space is a figure of hope, love, and happiness, which presents itself as particularly attractive to lovers. The lovers rise up on their wings of desire<sup>17</sup> to lead a love life that is free from earthly conditions – in a world made of air and love. What is expected from the vision of floating above the ground is not only a mobility excess and shared dynamism with the air but also achieving a union with nature (sun, moon, clouds, wind), an encounter with birds, angels, and God, an arrival in the heaven of freedom, safety, and happiness. This corresponds to cultural conceptions of love: placed in locations far from society, an exclusive and ennobling feeling of a particularly high moral and emotional value. Air offers

<sup>17</sup> Cf. the famous romantic fantasy film *Der Himmel über Berlin* (1987), directed by Wim Wenders, with the very significant English title *Wings of desire* – a variation on the story of love and flight, of humans and angels.

an infinitely open space for love, which stands in contrast to all possible earthly obstacles: to the narrow, to the heavy, to all possible temporal, spatial, and cultural restrictions which can be represented metaphorically by the lack of air. In the space of freedom and weightlessness beyond all social ties, ecstatic unions occur, the bodies of the lovers are intertwined, and they become even one inseparable body – the utopian body, surrounded by a halo of energy. Although the lovers have left their life worlds and transcended all boundaries, they are occasionally caught up with the earth, since the poems vary in mythological, religious, and cultural motifs representing different narratives of love. Moreover, the 'high flying' project of gaining access to the sphere of infinity (the pathos of flight) goes hand in hand with the prospect of disappointment, disillusionment, and intimate disasters and thus also shows the limitations of utopian imaginations. Flight of lovers appears to be an ambivalent project, if only because some men or women are excluded from it; they cannot fly or have forgotten how to, they are too heavy or too old, they have broken wings, they are afraid of meteorological contingencies or of falling.

The open airspace stretching around human and non-human beings promises a new order of love without binary oppositions and competition. Nevertheless, the poetic texts occasionally reflect gender differences and include some aspects of this issue – for example, heroic traditions of spatial domination or an Icarus attitude, and connections with technical developments. Even in iconographic discourses, traces of typical gender constellations can be noticed. They manifest themselves, for example, through body positions, male orientation, and navigation, or female affinity to the wind and clouds. There are also culturally inflected scenarios of separate dreams and male problems with the unconditionality of love.

The atmospheres – "elemental spacetimes that are simultaneously affective and meteorological" (McCormack 2018: 4) – are produced in texts and images in different ways, which create a kind of materiality and conjure "a second ghostly atmosphere through signification" (Chandler 2011: 561). Words, phrases, shapes, colors, positions, and constellations have an atmospheric effect and at the same time, they tell a story about love, even with many gaps, uncertainties, and ambivalences. The analyzed cultural texts reveal the atmospheres of heaviness, narrowness, sultriness, torpor, and sadness as pre-conditions for love flights. Rising into the air (movement) or dreaming about it (suggestion of movement) signifies a new situation for lovers – a transfer into a sphere of spatially extended love which could envelop them like an atmospheric force. The unseen "great air" ("große Luft") provides an image of a comfortable environment under clouds and wind as well as of the fragile condition of love – also in the context of a union with natural forces like birds. The very act of flying imagined as an experience of transgression can liberate from earthly burdens, but on the other hand, flying lovers are exposed to the invisible power of air, to the transient character of weather, and to constant impermanence. Love can be analyzed in terms of invisible energies, moods and situations, fatigue factors, unpredictable dynamics, intensities, perturbations, and warm and cold fronts. Only the effects of these forces are visible, like the effect of the wind on the pictures. This is the truly atmospheric concept of love as an airy power or a fleeting phenomenon that emerges from the poetic and iconographic depictions of flying lovers, even if they have a claim to aimless flight and eternal love. Significantly, Ben Anderson's definition of atmosphere can be read as a description of love: "Something, an ill-defined something, that exceeds rational explanation and clear figuration. Something that hesitates at the edge of the unsayable" (Anderson 2009: 78).

The findings of this essay can be understood as a contribution to cultural atmospheric research and to love studies as an interdisciplinary field. With such aspects as leaving the usual sphere of life, connection with nature and non-human beings, special qualities of air, depotentiation of power and domination, blurring of boundaries, dialectics of heaviness and lightness, the topic of flying lovers provides opportunities to think about the elemental conditions of love in a broader sense: "about exposure to the otherness of the world, to the condition of finitude, and to whatever is excessive of this finitude" (McCormack 2018: 82). This may be considered a promising aspect of research on our being-in-the-world across the human and non-human materialities and the human search for happiness: not only in discursive spaces but also in the spheres of invisible, ineffable, shifting, ephemeral, non-representable phenomena to be included in explorations in the field of contemporary humanities. The imaginary idea of flying lovers provided by literature and the visual arts can be considered an important thinking device – even if people cannot fly and there is no perspective to realize that dream. According to Olga Tokarczuk (2019): "Perhaps that is what the role of an artist relies on – giving a foretaste of something that could exist and thus causing it to become imaginable. And being imagined is the first stage of existence."

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