

Reinfandt, Christoph, and Ellen Dengel-Janic. "Voice and Perception in Transcultural Realities: The Case of India." *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 61.1 (2013): 1-4. Cf. www.zaa.uni-tuebingen.de

ELLEN DENGEL-JANIC
AND
CHRISTOPH REINFANDT

Voice and Perception in Transcultural Realities: The Case of India

In the wake of Gérard Genette's influential analysis of *Narrative Discourse* (1980 [1972]), the distinction of 'voice' and 'perception' – or, as Genette has it, between 'narration' (who speaks?) and 'focalisation' (who perceives, sees, hears, smells?) – has long been acknowledged as marking two distinct but interrelated basic functions of narrative which can be traced in the formal features of verbal and even non-verbal narrative texts (cf. Mellmann 2010, 135-8). At the same time, and on a more general note, cultural studies and postcolonial studies have frequently taken recourse to 'voice' and 'perception' when addressing questions of authority and (dis-)empowerment on the one hand and residual personal experience in the face of overwhelming social and cultural forces on the other. It is this wider view that the present special issue of ZAA seeks to adopt while insisting on the analytical advantage of 'voice' and 'perception' as formal categories in order to gain a more specific access to cultural processes. The works under discussion here often adopt already existing literary voices and traditions and use them to create novel impressions and perceptions of 'Indian culture.'

This volume's focus on India is a step into the direction of 'localising' literary traditions and their impact on the perception of the particular place and cultural milieu that they are concerned with. In fact, the articles share an interest in the re-workings of inherited – at times colonial – literary models that Indian poets, novelists and dramatists appropriate and use to counter preconceived perceptions of Indian culture and society. Our contributors have identified perceptions of Indian culture on the one hand, and Indian readings of Western culture on the other, in a variety of texts over a range of literary periods. One look at the colonial period in Indian history undoubtedly reveals that literature was involved in creating authoritative images of the 'other' culture, images consumed by British and Indian readerships alike. However, it is our contention here, that it is not only Orientalism (Said 1978) that told narratives of the East and influenced Western perceptions of India, but that Indian understandings of Western culture need to be foregrounded, too. Today, Indian ways of perception such as, for example, disseminated by the Bollywood film industry but also by the popular genre of the Indian novel in English, have entered the global mainstream.

While orientalist and exoticist images of India in Western media still circulate and the mere labelling of Indian artistic production as postcolonial continues, the encounter of Western and Indian literature is often a creative effort to challenge our own one-sided view and perception of the 'other' culture. So, while the inherited narratives of the colonial experience and the period of decolonisation are present in the cultural imaginary produced by a shared history, the perception of the 'other' culture in immediate encounters might actually change both parties. As Sara Ahmed argues,

[t]he term encounter suggests a meeting, but a meeting that involves surprise and conflict. We can ask: how does identity itself become instituted through encounters with others that surprise, that shift the boundaries of the familiar, of what we assume that we know? (Ahmed 2000, 6-7)

In a series of conferences held in the context of the partnership between the universities of Pune in India and Tübingen in Germany, an immediate encounter of Indian and German colleagues resulted in a volume of essays that brings together different perspectives and perceptions of literary texts that have been conceived in India. The contributions to the present volume are loosely framed by Gerhard Stilz's systematic charting of categories suitable for (quite literally) coming to terms with the complexities of transcultural contact zones established by "ongoing cultural transformation processes in globalised contexts" (Sarkowsky / Schulze-Engler 2012, 310). Originally presented by Stilz in an earlier version on the first of these conferences, "Meeting Modernities – Trading Traditions," in 2008,¹ the model has evolved into its present form in subsequent years, taking into account the shift from intercultural relationships, postcolonialism and multiculturalism to (trans-)cultural studies (cf. Huggan 2004) and, more generally, from hybridity into transculturality that has been debated in the last decade or so (cf., for example, Welsch 1999, Schulze-Engler 2007, Schulze-Engler / Helff 2009, as well as the last section in Stilz / Dengel-Janic 2010, 215-40, entitled "Transcultural Perspectives"). Reconceptualising 'contact' as a process which unfolds in up to seven stages, Gerhard Stilz' article charts the personal, social and cultural implications of this process (which may, more often than not, well be cut short at one point or another), providing orientation in the complex negotiations between personal experience, communication, mediation, representation and institutionalisation that are characteristic of culture in general, but more pressing and contentious in contact zones.

The remaining contributions collected in this volume are diverse, both in terms of their historical focus and in terms of their objects of study, but they share an interest in what goes on in Indian transcultural contact zones at certain historical moments, be they colonial or postcolonial. Chandrani Chatterjee analyses the plural-

ity of voices and perceptions produced by the colonial encounter in nineteenth-century Calcutta and Bengal in order to facilitate a more complex understanding of processes of Westernisation, modernisation and Indianisation. Christoph Reinfandt, on the other hand, while dealing with the same period and location, presents three close readings of poems written in English by Bengali writers in nineteenth-century Calcutta in order to demonstrate to what extent the writers' poetic voices that were shaped by the English poetic tradition as introduced to Bengal in the new educational curriculum affected their perceptions of Indian reality. And still focussing on the nineteenth century, Urmila Bhirdikar traces the emergence of Marathi theatre from the 1850s onwards in its deft correlation of Western genres, local forms and classical models with a particular focus on the text and performance of Annasaheb Kirloskar's (1843-85) second play, *Sangit Saubhadra* (1882-3).

The final two contributions to the volume focus on more recent developments. Dirk Wiemann analyses how the traditional ruralist paradigm of treating 'the village' as central to India's self-descriptions resurfaces in recent economic practices as a cultural reference point in spite of having long been superseded by a metropolitan imaginary. And finally, Ellen Dengel-Janic's reading of Rana Dasgupta's novel *Tokyo Cancelled* (2005) focuses on the text's handling of the storytelling voices of anonymous strangers who make 'contact' in the truly transcultural, fully globalised 'non-place' (Augé 1995) of an unnamed airport lounge where the passengers are stranded after their flight to Tokyo has been cancelled.

All in all, the articles collected here convey that encounters are imagined in different genres and contexts. In each instance, "the boundaries of the familiar" (Ahmed 2000, 7) are indeed shifted by aesthetic means and in consequence both the familiar and the unfamiliar are seen through a different 'lens.' Often, it is more than one voice that resounds in the depictions of encounters in the texts under consideration. At times, these voices are inherited and adopted from other cultural traditions such as the English poetic tradition (Reinfandt) and frame tales (Dengel-Janic). Or, they might be translated into different generic conventions such as the English *Rasa* in Marathi theatre (Bhirdikar). Those acts of adoption and translation very frequently result in new ways of perception rooted in the actual transcultural contexts and settings, even if one remains within an exclusively Indian setting (Wiemann), or, respectively, in the colonial "contact zone" (Pratt 1992) as manifest in nineteenth-century Calcutta's literary world (Chatterjee). Western perceptions of India and Indian perceptions of the West, as this volume attempts to show, have in fact from the nineteenth century onwards not been one-sided and reductive and are now influenced by an even more vibrant and productive exchange of literary traditions and aesthetic modes.

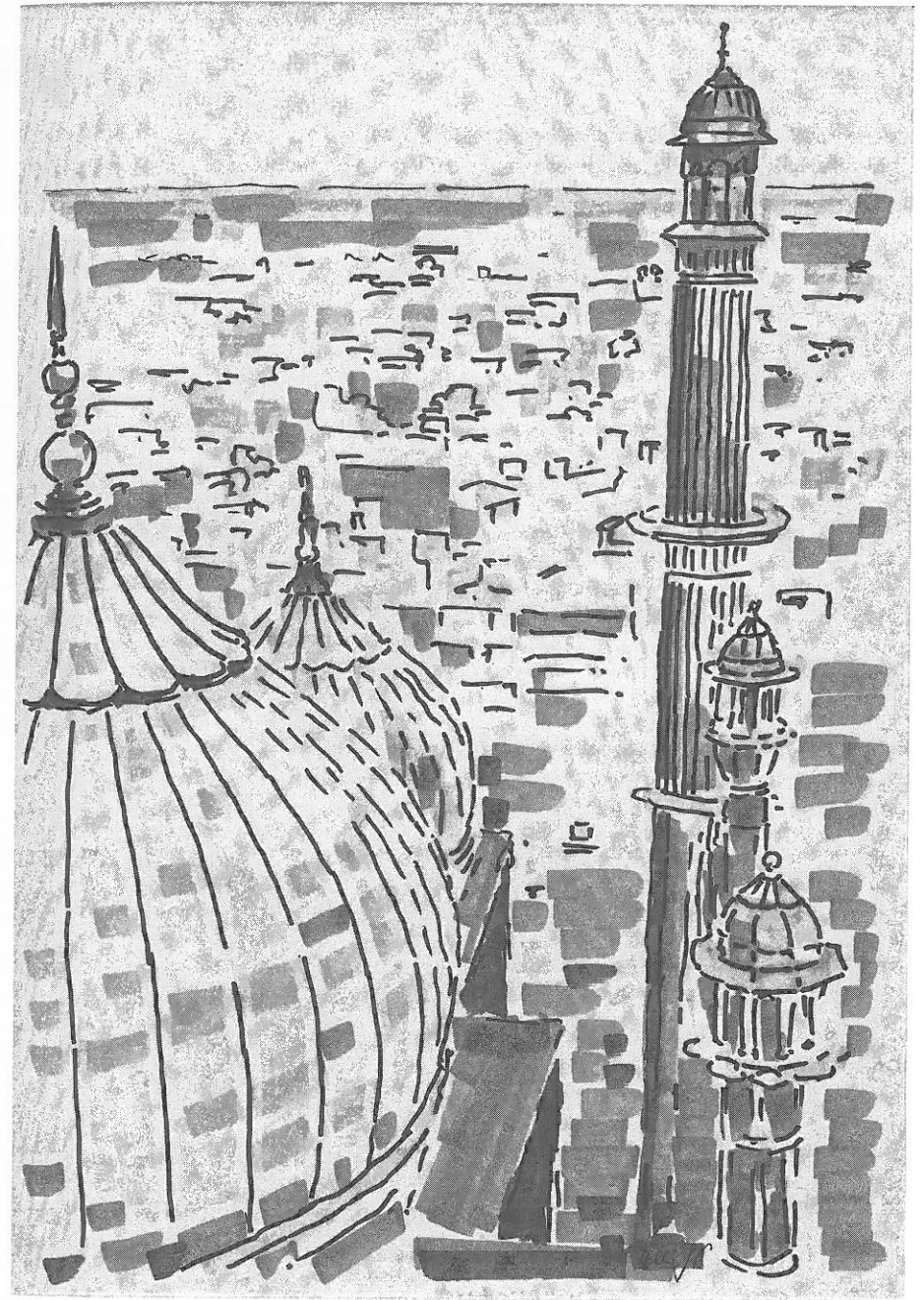
As a special feature, this volume also includes sketches and drawings by Gerhard Stilz which were developed on the basis of photographs taken during his stay in India from 1968 to 1970, thus testifying to inter- and transcultural perception processes on a very personal level (cf. 5-6, 16, 32, 46, 86-8). The editors would like

¹ The conferences, all held in Tübingen, were entitled "Meeting Modernities – Trading Traditions" (November 20-21, 2008), "Romantic Misunderstandings: Translating Cultures Between East and West after 1800" (July 10, 2009) and "Voice and Perception in Transcultural Realities" (July 15, 2011). Detailed information about the conferences can be found on the following website: <<http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/angl/pune-tuebingen/>> (February 4, 2013).

to thank Gerhard Stilz for providing these images and for his role in opening up this research field to scholars of English Studies in Germany in the first place: without him, this part of our academic practice would not be what it is.

Works Cited

- Ahmed, Sara (2000). *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. London: Routledge.
- Augé, Marc (1995). *Non-Places: An Introduction to the Anthropology of Supermodernity*. London: Verso.
- Genette, Gérard (1980 [1972]). *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Huggan, Graham (2004). "Postcolonialism, Globalization, and the Rise of (Trans-) Cultural Studies." Geoffrey V. Davis et al., eds. *Towards a Transcultural Future: Literature and Society in a 'Post'-Colonial World*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 27-35.
- Mellmann, Katja (2010). "Voice and Perception: An Evolutionary Approach to the Basic Functions of Narrative." Frederick Luis Aldana, ed. *Toward a Cognitive Theory of Narrative Acts*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 119-40.
- Pratt, Mary Louise (1992). *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Said, Edward W. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Random House.
- Sarkowsky, Katja and Frank Schulze-Engler (2012). "Postcolonial Studies." Martin Middeke et al., eds. *English and American Studies: Theory and Practice*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 301-13.
- Schulze-Engler, Frank (2007). "Theoretical Perspectives: From Postcolonialism to Transcultural World Literature." Lars Eckstein, ed. *English Literatures Across the Globe: A Companion*. Paderborn: Fink, 20-32.
- Schulze-Engler, Frank and Sissy Helff, eds. (2009). *Transcultural English Studies: Theories, Fictions, Realities*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Stilz, Gerhard and Ellen Dengel-Janic, eds. (2010). *South Asian Literatures*. Trier: WVT.
- Welsch, Wolfgang (1999). "Transculturality: The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today." Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash, eds. *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*. London: Sage, 194-213.



Delhi – Jama Masjid