

Comptes rendus

Wolfgang Klooss, ed. *Across the Lines. Intertextuality and Transcultural Communication in the New Literatures in English*. Rodopi, 1998.

Monika Fludernik, ed. *Hybridity and Postcolonialism. Twentieth-Century Indian Literature*. Stauffenburg, 1998.

The two substantial collections of critical essays edited by German scholars and based on papers read at conferences on the New Literatures in English held in Trier (1995) and Konstanz (1996) illustrate the importance of postcolonial studies at German universities and the theoretical orientation that German scholars by now share with their colleagues elsewhere in the world. Indeed, for as much as the critical discourse has moved away from Commonwealth literature studies so has German scholarship moved beyond its (successful) introduction of English language literary texts to German students. These first attempts dating back to the early 1970s subsequently led to the formation of a loose group of academics who since 1977 would meet annually and who finally founded the Association for the Study of the New Literatures in English (ASNEL) in 1989. *Across the Lines* is the third volume of the series of ASNEL Papers (with vols. 7 and 8 now in print). *Hybridity and Postcolonialism*, on the other hand, arose from papers read at one of the Konstanz conference panels and was complemented by further contributions invited by its editor. It is the first publication on »Postcolonial Literatures,=one of the research projects of »Identities and Alterities«, pursued at the University of Freiburg. The net cast in *Across the Lines* is wider than in Fludernik's book as it virtually pulls in the whole catch of the New Literatures in English while *Hybridity and Postcolonialism* is confined to texts by Indian authors. Essays on Africa and Australia/New Zealand and the Pacific Region dominate the former with diaspora writing being paid major attention, although the total absence of studies on the substantial body of Indian diasporic literature is astounding considering that »transcultural communication« is one of the two topics of the book. This may be due to German university courses privileging either the study of African writing or of the former settler-colonies **B** including Canada (which is dealt with in a separate volume of the Trier conference papers.).

Further concerns relate to women writing, the relationship of literary texts and the media and of dominant and minority culture. Of central importance are two theoretical essays. Frank Schulze-Engler's highly critical reflections on the bearings of intertextuality on cross-cultural criticism with reference to the binary fallacy of two 'intertextuality models' (Prießnitz, 1990; Brydon/Tiffin, 1993) emphasise the necessary historicisation of text, language and time/space. His critique of foregrounding 'textuality' in studies of 'intertextuality' has been noted by several contributors, but it would perhaps be unfair to expect immediate and sustained responses. Mark Stein's excellent discussion of the dual-coding parody in Dambudzo Marechera's work ends on the note that "his texts [my emphasis] concurrently claim *and* reject both, their European and their African heritage." Janet Wilson's comparison of Keri Hulme and Janet Frame "reinventing myths of Aotearoa" in *the bone people* and *The Carpathians* respectively, offers an incisive analysis of the two writers' break with the New Zealand narrative tradition, yet her concluding sentence that such a reading "open[s] up territory for a broad historico-critical interpretation [my emphasis] of the decolonising fictions of the Eighties and Nineties" also stops short of Schulze-Engler's reservation. Altogether, the crossing of borderlines is scrutinised more often in its textual strategic version than as an encompassing transcultural manoeuvre: Gundula Wilke looks at Thomas King 'writing back' to the Bible; Detlev Gohrbandt relates Doris Lessing and Bessie Head's stories to fable traditions; and Borislava Sasic discovers Somali and Greek theatre elements in Nuruddin Farah's *Sardines*. Yet it should be admitted that none of these (and other) papers totally neglects aspects of the historical and cultural dimension of their intertextual approach.

By comparison, the process of transcultural communication in its wider sense is focused upon when "cross-cultural criticism is anchored in a sustained interest in the various modernities that have evolved in various parts of the world," as Schulze-Engler puts it. To mention a few examples: Cecile Sandten points out interhistorical dimensions in Sujata Bhatt's poetry while Josef Pesch argues that the depiction of unresolved cultural clashes in Michael Ondaatje's novels relate them to the co-existence of many cultures. Martina Ghosh-Schellhorn asks why Jean Rhys does not let Antoinette escape death in her 'writing-back'

novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* and finds an answer in the author's "collusion with the Creole self-image as presented to her by colonial ideology."

Berndt Schulte adds a second strand to *Across the Lines* arguing that intertextuality and transcultural communication should be brought together by anchoring postcolonial studies to an historically grounded media theory thus replacing intertextuality with intermediality. Mediaspace would supersede the prioritising of the written text thereby foreclosing the danger of re-marginalizing postcolonial studies. Interestingly, a few papers in the present volume follow Schulte's cue. Augustine Okereke suggests bringing together videotaped performances and written texts to better understand "oral literary performances," while Pamela Z. Dube looks at the cultural, social and political impact on thematic and poetic characteristics of present day South African performance poetry. In the same vein Susan Arndt explores the presence of oral elements, especially "mothers=stories" in Igbo women writing, and Gerhard Fischer's presentation of Mudrooroo's "aboriginalization" of a play by the German playwright Heiner Müller foregrounds the performance aspect of theatre medium.

Hybridity and Postcolonialism may partly be read as a version of >writing back= to Homi Bhabha since Fludernik's own extended essay does not only explicate Bhabha's concept of hybridity but contributes also to the shape of the collection. One of her main reservations relates to Bhabha's intimately connecting hybridity and diasporic writing which she counters with the argument that "hybridity [Y is] a much more variegated concept than it is usually given credence for." With few exceptions, other contributors who generally combine theoretical reflection and textual criticism also echo the Indian critic in their wrestling with hybridity, postcolonialism and/or gender/feminism. While some of them have chosen to proceed comparatively, others analyse a single work, and on the whole Indian writers living abroad are paid more attention than those who live at home. Walter Göbel's use of >chaos= as a metaphor and a structuring principle brings together colonial and postcolonial writing in his attempt to map the representation of India as an imaginary community, while Martina Ghosh-Schellhorn focuses on Indian women's >transitional identity= from a gender perspective and includes Indo-English émigré and >home> writers as well as women writing in

Indian languages. Both critics= productive interventions in the discourse on hybridity are extended by Gerhard Stilz who argues that G.V. Desani's *All About H. Hatterr* is a diasporic text whose hybridity has less to do with the heterogeneity of its cultural dilemma than "with its vital and healing notion of an integral whole," while Samir Goyal looks at Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* as a self-reflexive hybrid artefact. These and other findings of the studies included in the collection do indeed pursue and reveal differing aspects of hybridity depending on their foregrounding of either nation/location or gender, world view or textual structure and contribute to the ongoing discourse on postcolonial writing.

Both collections have their merits, with *Hybridity and Postcolonialism* perhaps being the slightly less stimulating publication since apart from excellent single pieces a few contributions do not quite fit into it or do not present an equally high standard of scholarship as the examples mentioned. Yet there can be no doubt that their overall scholarly solidity recommends the two collections to all students of the New Literatures in English and the discourse of postcolonial theory.

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