

Reinfandt, Christoph. "Voices Shaping Perception: On the Emergence of Modern Indian Poetry in English." *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 61.1 (2013): 33-45.

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Voices Shaping Perception: On the Emergence of Modern Indian Poetry in English

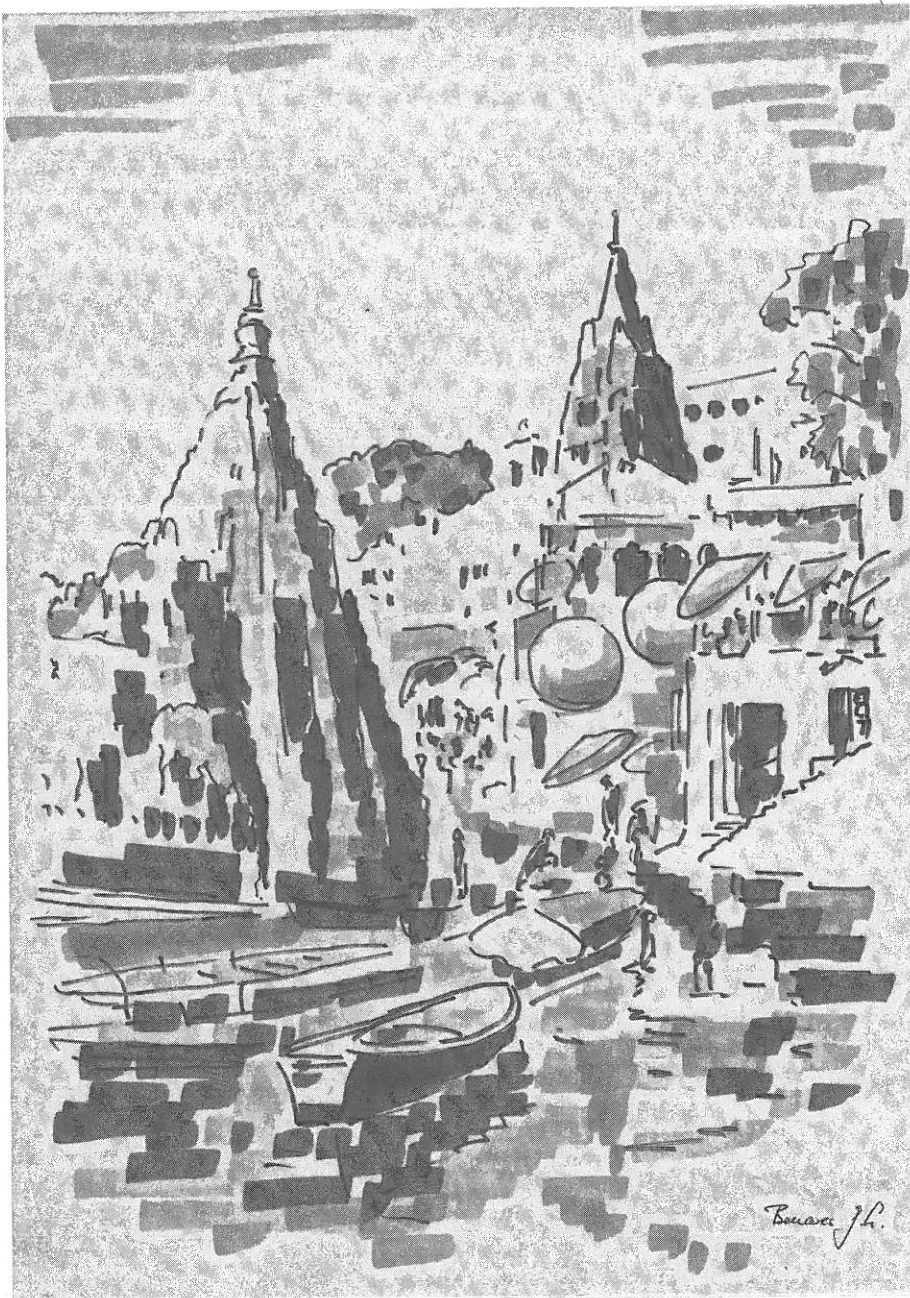
Abstract: This paper presents three close readings of Indian poems in English that were written around 1870 by members of the eminent Dutt dynasty of writers in Calcutta. The readings of Govin Chunder Dutt's "Vizagapatam," Greece Chunder Dutt's "The Soonderbuns" and Toru Dutt's "Sonnet – Baugmaree" centre around the question how the poets' perception of Indian reality was affected by the English conventions of poetic diction and poetic voice available at the time. By way of conclusion, the three poems are then assessed with regard to their creative strategies for encountering the Other of the English poetic tradition in the light of the categories mimicry, hybridity and identity.

1. Introduction

In his ground-breaking monograph on *Modern Indian Poetry in English*, Bruce King pointedly observed that after Indian independence, many writers and critics (and indeed readers) felt that Indian poetry in English

of the pre-independence period was [...] a mass of sentiments, clichés, outdated language and conventions, the ossified remains of a colonial tradition badly in need of a new start through grafting on a vital body of contemporary verse and contact with contemporary life and speech. (King 2001, 11)

While this assessment finds itself in tune with the early-20th-century modernist rejection of the late-Romantic state of English poetry at the end of the 19th century, the situation is obviously more complicated in 19th-century India. Not being part of the English poetic tradition, aspiring poets in India who wanted to write in English could not just carve out their individual positions by rejecting that tradition, as modernist writers would do some decades later in a somewhat paradoxical move based on the very paradigm of innovation and originality that was actually established through the Romantic aesthetics they rejected. Instead, Indian poets had to appropriate and assimilate the English tradition first. Accordingly, many of the poems in Eunice de Souza's anthology of *Early Indian Poetry in English* from 1829 to 1947, which established a tentative canon of pre-independence poetry only in 2005, thus testify to the overwhelming influence of Romanticism as well as older, especially neoclassical models as encoded in the English poetic conventions that entered India as part of the educational agenda of the British Empire in the



Benares (Venarasi) – Ghats with sliding temple

19th century (cf. de Souza 2010). These poems provide interesting material for an inquiry into processes of cultural transformation in contact zones¹ and into the diversification of modernity in colonial and postcolonial settings such as India.² Leaving behind the agendas of literary history and aesthetics in favour of a broader view not exclusively concerned with questions of literary value, the following exemplary readings of three poems by members of the eminent Dutt dynasty of writers from 19th-century Bengal will show to what extent the conventions of poetic voice did affect the poets' perception of Indian reality.

While two of the poems, Govin Chunder Dutt's "Vizagapatam" and Greece Chunder Dutt's "The Soonderbuns," were originally published in the legendary *Dutt Family Album* (London: Longmans, 1870), Toru Dutt's "Sonnet – Baumaree" was written slightly later (between 1873 and 1877) and then found its way into her *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882/85).³ Among the many poems collected in de Souza's anthology these are the ones which are most clearly concerned with the depiction of specific places, ranging from town (Vizagapatam on the east coast of India) through landscape and nature (the Sundarbans covering an area on the coast of the Bay of Bengal shared by India and Bangladesh today) to the garden of the Dutt family's country house Baumaree on the outskirts of Calcutta, as today's Kolkata was then called. The following readings of these poems of place will pay particular attention to the role of poetic voice and what it does to the poems' representations of Indian places and spaces. While a theoretical framework for assessing these encounters between reality, perception, voice and cultural conventions can be formulated in terms of the categories mimicry, hybridity and identity (cf. Stilz 1999), the readings will also have to be contextualised historically against the background of the following systematic observations on the voices and forms of English poetry that can be considered as established conventions by the mid-19th century.

2. Poetic Voices, Romantic and Otherwise

The core problem hovering behind the emergence and evolution of modern English poetry is the question of how the individual subjective voice can claim cultural authority in representations of perception and experience. With this premise in mind, the following outline for a history of English poetry can be drawn: After

¹ The key term 'contact zone' is used in the sense introduced in Pratt 1992. See also Gerhard Stilz' contribution to the present volume.

² For a neat summary of this debate cf. Wiemann 2008 and, for a more recent Indian perspective, Mohanty 2011.

³ *The Dutt Family Album* gathered works by the three brothers Govin (1828-84), Greece (1833-92) and Hur Chunder Dutt (1831-1901) plus a nephew, Omesh Chunder Dutt (1836-1912). Toru Dutt (1856-77) is Govin's daughter. On the family's eminent standing in Bengali society and their poetic activities in English cf. Chaudhuri 2003, on the broader contexts of the Bengal Renaissance cf. Dasgupta 2011, and on poetry in 19th-century Calcutta more generally see Chandrani Chatterjee's contribution to the present volume.

the 'invention of poetic subjectivity' that finds its earliest expression in Shakespeare's sonnets (cf. Fineman 1986) and the work of metaphysical poets, the neoclassical poetics of the early 18th century tried to contain this force by re-establishing 'objective' norms of poetic practice drawing on ancient models and the ideal of a God-given, stable social order. This attempt at clinging to a pre-modern regime was followed by a full-scale 'revolution in literary style,' i.e. the surge of subjectivity manifest in the poetics of sensibility (cf. McGann 1996). This subjective turn was, however, still lacking in cultural authority and legitimacy. Romanticism then tried to come up with a compromise that should enable poetry to have it both ways, i.e. to capture the personal experience of the individual in his or her direct perception of the world in specific situations (as in Wordsworth's famous formula "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," cf. Wordsworth 2007, 62 and 82) and to imbue this experience with broader or even universal significance by adding the critical distance of memory and reflection.⁴ Accordingly, Romantic voices mediate between individual and personal perception and experience on the one hand and the subjective and more general or even universal dimensions opened up by reflection, which is in turn made possible by temporal distance, on the other. The speaking situations of Romantic poetry thus tend to be shaded by a certain degree of abstraction and covertness, which is in turn linked to questions of poetic form, i.e. the representation of the lyrical speaker's utterance in writing according to certain poetic conventions ranging from more 'natural,' quasi-oral forms like ballads, songs, short lyrical poems and conversation poems in blank verse on the one hand to forms clearly shaped in writing like formally elaborate odes, sonnets or, as a logical consequence of formal individualisation from which Romantic poetry still shies away but which will come to full fruition with modernism, free forms and experimental composite orders (cf. Curran 1986).

This charting of the options for Romantic poetry in terms of voice and form can be mapped on to the historical scheme of modern *Poetry as Discourse* as introduced by Antony Easthope (1983). Easthope identifies the sonnet as the central poetic form of the early modern age, heroic couplets as the medium of neoclassicism, blank verse as the degree zero of Romantic poetry, and free verse as the hallmark of modernism. As the preceding sketch has made clear, Romantic poetry is certainly not restricted to blank verse but rather tries to establish an inclusive framework of poetic forms ranging from simple traditional stanzas (which indicate points of departure from and a certain degree of continuity with folk and popular culture) through the flexible medium of blank verse (which allows for a fluid account of experience and consciousness but maintains metrical regularity as a marker of poeticity, as it were – this is the fault line addressed at length in Wordsworth's preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*) to elaborate poetic forms like the sonnet and an

⁴ As clarified in the less famous, but seminal second half of Wordsworth's definition of poetry, which comes in two variants: "But though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached were never produced [...] but by a man who [...] had also thought long and deeply" (62), and, more concisely, "[Poetry] takes its origins from emotion recollected in tranquillity" (82).

anticipation of the modernist turn to formal experiment. While it is this dimension of originality and innovation which gradually takes over the cosmopolitan prestige of neoclassical form in the post-Romantic dispensation of modern poetry, Romanticism is also broad enough to accommodate the relative merits of indigenous traditions in processes of aesthetic domestication and purification. And it is in this force field of cosmopolitan elegance, aesthetic innovation and cultural nationalism that aspiring colonial poets had to position themselves with each and every poem in English.

All this (and much more) began to trickle into India in the course of the 19th century, beginning with Henry Derozio's sonnets from the late 1820s and D.L. Richardson's "Evening on the Banks of the Ganges" (c. 1830) with its very explicit echoes of Wordsworth's "Daffodils" and of his famous sonnet "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, Sept. 3, 1802":

I wander'd thoughtfully by Gunga's shore
While the broad sun upon the slumb'ring wave
Its last faint flush of golden radiance gave,
And tinged with tenderest hues some ruins hoar.
Methinks this earth had never known before
A calm so deep [...]
(qtd. as printed in *The Gentleman's Magazine* No. 8, 1837, 388, ll. 1-6)⁵

As de Souza's anthology amply illustrates, all kinds of voices and forms had been tried out by aspiring Indian writers of poetry in English by the time "Vizagapatam," "The Soonderbuns" and "Baugmaree" were written in the 1860s and 70s. The following readings of the three poems will provide exemplary case studies of such attempts at self-positioning and self-fashioning by means of a coloniser's language and literary conventions. They are of particular interest because of their direct engagement with Indian localities.

3. Townscapes: Vizagapatam

Even the briefest introductory text such as the one that can be found with James Tillyer Blunt's 1795 pen-and-ink and water-colour drawing of Vizagapatam on the British Library Online Gallery suggests that the city of that name is, in terms of its numerous historical rulers and of its equally numerous cultural and religious allegiances, a quintessentially Indian place:

Visakhapatnam, located on the east coast of India in Andhra Pradesh[,] commands a spectacular position between the Eastern Ghats and the sea. Built around a fine natural harbour it was originally a small fishing village in the Kalinga Empire. Visakhapatnam

⁵ Where the speaker in Wordsworth's sonnet is looking east on a clear morning full of optimism and open-mindedness, letting his 'I' be absorbed into the world, Richardson's speaker is looking west in the evening in a pessimistic mood, keeping his 'I' at a distance from the world in dreamlike enthrallment. For a reading of Richardson's poem against the broader emergence of Indian poetry in English cf. Stolz 1999.

was subjected to the rule of several different dynasties from the Andhra Kings of Vengi to the Pallavas, Cholas and Gangas until, in the 15th century, it became a part of the Vijaya Nagar Empire. A British factory was established here in 1683 which was taken by French 1757 and recaptured the following year. Each of the three rocky hills that surround the town are of significance to different religions, on the Venkateswa Konda is the Hindu Venkateswara Temple, the Darga Konda boasts a Muslim mausoleum and the highest, Ross Hill has a Roman Catholic church. (*British Library Online Gallery*, n.p.)

Blunt's drawing, on the other hand, which he executed while employed on survey work with the Bengal engineers between 1783 to 1810, does not show much of a city, and the landscape depicted does not strike the viewer as particularly Indian at all, while a slightly more urban and Indian impression is created by Elisha Trapaud's pencil and wash drawing of the walled city of Vizagapatam (c. 1806) that can also be found in the British Library Online Gallery.

Govin Chunder Dutt's poem "Vizagapatam" begins by recounting the speaker's arrival in this city from the sea:

Down went the anchor and the ship stood fast,
Rocking upon the billows, while around
Wheeled the white sea-birds, rising with the blast,
Or skimming lightly o'er the depth's profound,
White, oh! how white, beneath the morning ray,
Like fitful snowflakes 'mid the ocean-spray.
(de Souza 2010, 39-40, ll. 1-6)

Again, there is nothing Indian here, and the arrival by ship and the reference to snow (l. 6) seem to indicate an affinity with the coloniser's perspective as captured in a descriptive voice that does not make any explicit reference to itself as a speaking 'I' but is nevertheless affectively touched by its observations, as the exclamation in l. 5 indicates. Only in stanzas 2 and 3 does the Indianness of the setting begin to assert itself tentatively with references to coffee-plants (l. 10), temples (l. 16), palms and betel-nuts (l. 18), while the overall impression remains rather English with hills, smooth verdure, ledges and trees characterizing the landscape (ll. 7-9) and villas, houses and huts (ll. 13/17) indicating a social hierarchy within the settlement, while the simile in the lines "And spanning all like God's embracing love, / Sublime and stainless, hung the sky above" (11/12) indicates a Wordsworthian, somewhat secular metaphysical frame. All through these first three stanzas of the poem there is no explicit 'I,' and the description remains fairly unspecific throughout.

The reason for this is actually given in stanza 4 of the poem, i.e. at the beginning of its second half: What we have read so far is not the description of an actual place, but rather the memory of "a vision of the poet's fancy born" (ll. 19/20) that was triggered by the actual place, but then framed by a variety of poetic imagination imported from the English tradition, as is clearly indicated by a marked but unidentified quotation from John Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" (1819): "His 'magic casements opening on the foam / Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn'" (ll. 21/22). The rest of stanza 4 and the following stanza then celebrate this purely

poetic vision as an alternative reality which surpasses nature in its timelessness ("Is there a spot which Nature deigns to bless / With such profusion as this woodland scene? / The fairest flowerets here perennial glow! / The freshest breezes here forever blow!" ll. 27-30).

Surprisingly, however, the final stanza of the poem thoroughly deflates this vision in an unexpected turn towards reality as it stands before the speaker's eyes:

Thought uncontrolled erratic ever flies,
 And he that writes mused idly – Can this be
 Our long-lost, not forgotten Paradise?
 When lo! He started from his trance to see,
 Where o'er the hills the devious footpath led,
 A long and sad procession bear the dead.
 (de Souza 2010, 39-40, ll. 31-6)

The timelessness of poetic vision of the English Romantic/Keatsian variety is here starkly confronted with the reality of death. What is more, the speaker indicates that the alienation of imagination from reality is, on the one hand, an effect of writing and the Wordsworthian temporal distance it imposes. But on the other hand, the act of writing ("he that writes" – present tense) can also break that spell ("mused idly" – past tense, l. 32). As the last three lines indicate, the intrusion of reality can also be captured in writing in order to keep the flights of poetic imagination in check, which then appear as erratic thoughts and idle musings (ll. 31/32).

What the poem presents, then, is actually no poetry of place at all, but rather a meta-poetic reflection on the distance between world and poetic voice. On the level of voice, the implicit 'I' as manifest in stanzas 1 to 5 does not abandon the fairly neutral tone of the poem in the final stanza, but rather presents itself in a distanced version as 'he,' indicating the poem's stance of second-order observation. On the level of poetic form, on the other hand, the poem's iambic pentameter lines rhyming ababcc are kept rather simple and unobtrusive, neither fully songlike nor in the fashion of elaborate Romantic odes as epitomised by Keats's "Ode to the Nightingale." They clearly avoid ostentatious artfulness, while similarly the voice of the poem clearly shuns the emphatic and at times very explicit poetic subjectivity of the English Romantic tradition. And still, as the Keats quote and the apotheosis of the poetic imagination in the penultimate stanza illustrate, the poem nevertheless acknowledges the power of this imagination and is fascinated by it, if only to insist on the limits of this power at its end. "Vizagapatam" thus uses a specifically Indian locality to articulate its scepticism about the power of the imagination as encoded in the English poetic tradition, but this scepticism is not based on a perceived gap between English poetry and Indian reality but rather on the ultimate reality of death itself.

4. Nature: The Sundarbans

The Sundarbans, a huge wilderness of water, mangroves and Bengal tigers covering the Ganges delta in the South-West of Bangladesh and the Eastern tip of West Bengal in India, had been acknowledged as one of the most sublime stretches of nature long before they became nature reserves and National Parks from the 1970s onwards. Greece Chunder Dutt's poem "The Soonderbuns" represents one of its earliest representations in English, prominent recent examples include Salman Rushdie's nightmarish vision of the Sundarbans in the context of the operations of Pakistani troops in what was then East Pakistan in 1971 in book three of *Midnight's Children* (1971) and Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004). The poem is written in blank verse, but there is no typically Romantic twisted syntax which charts processes of perception or meditation. Instead a fairly neo-classical description of the landscape forms the first section of the poem:

In the wild district where the Ganges pours
 Its lavish waters by a hundred mouths
 Into the bosom of the sounding sea,
 Are plains, like prairies, of enormous length,
 Adorned with ancient trees of stately growth –
 And shady coverts of white-tasselled cane,
 In which, defended from the noonday heat,
 The mighty monarchs of the waste repose –
 [...]
 And leagues of woodland sparsely scattered o'er
 With mat-fenced villages – and seaward slopes,
 As smooth and verdant as a billiard board,
 O'er which unnumbered troops of nimble deer
 Range undisturbed – and fens whose sluggish streams
 With mazy error twist ten thousand ways –
 And dreary moors where naught the stillness breaks
 Except the eagle's scream, the bittern's boom,
 Or yet the sullen tiger's hoarse 'ragum.'
 (de Souza 2010, 55-7, ll. 1-20)

This does not sound like a mangrove forest at all (Plains and prairies? Ancient trees of stately growth? Smooth and verdant? Nimble deer?), but rather like Alexander Pope's neoclassical depiction of the estate of "Windsor Forest" (1719): "Here Hills and Vales, the Woodland and the Plain, / Here Earth and Water seem to strive again, / Not *Chaos*-like together crush'd and bruis'd / But as the World, harmoniously confus'd" (ll. 11-14, Fairer / Gerrard 1999, 102-13). When the poem here and there touches upon the distinctive features of the landscape such as fens with sluggish streams (l. 16), they are depicted as aberrations ("mazy error," l. 17), and the tigers are either completely assimilated into the poetic diction ("mighty monarchs of the waste," l. 8) or otherwise not particularly fierce ("re-

pose," l. 8, "sullen," l. 20) except for their slightly ridiculous "ragum" (l. 20) at the end of the introductory verse paragraph.⁶

As in Govin Chunder Dutt's "Vizagapatam" but in a different register (neoclassical decorum instead of Romantic imagination), English poetic diction and the resultant voice seem to have completely overshadowed the actual perception of reality at the beginning of "The Soonderbuns." In the poem's second section, however (ll. 21-37), the difference between English landscapes and the landscape of the Sundarbans is acknowledged in a long enumeration of what is *not* there to "diversify its face" (l. 21), i.e. "no hills," "[no] swelling uplands crowned with hamlets white," "[no] babbling rills," "[no] foaming water breaks o'er which the ash / Inclines its graceful arms," "[no] brooklets keen," "[no] lusty trout," "[no] winding dells that [...] / Reveal the gabled roofs of dairy farms," "[no] vast cathedrals with elm-guarded spires," "[no] modest manses amid bright parterres," "[no] high-walled orchards," "[no] mossy trees," "[no] genial sun (ll. 21-34). And yet, the speaker concludes in an intriguing mixture of neoclassical (l. 35) and Romantic qualities (ll. 36/37),

Yet has this delta an inherent grace,
An unsophisticated loveliness,
And rustic glory not to be surpassed.
(de Souza, 55-7, ll. 35-7)

The third part of the poem (ll. 38-58) then follows up on this acknowledgement of difference by pursuing the comparative angle introduced at the end of the second verse paragraph. It does so, again in a striking parallel to "Vizagapatam," by re-imagining the coloniser's perspective as he arrives from the sea and by imbuing the landscape before the stranger's eyes with features which render it less strange and basically comparable to his homeland:

Its dented coast line to the stranger yields,
On his first journey to Bengal by sea,
A sight as beautiful as that which greets
The sailor in the channel, when he makes
The shores of England near the Isle of Wight[.]
(de Souza, 55-7, ll. 38-42)

The "[d]elightful slopes green to the water's edge, / And lofty trees, that viewed from the ocean seem / Arranged to screen the windows of a pile, / (The castle dwelling of some mighty earl)" and "The herds of antlered deer that haunt the coast" (ll. 45-48/51) which the sailor half expects and half imagines on his return to England seem to point back to the opening of the poem itself. They are, however, clearly marked as the products of a poetic vision completely detached from the actual landscapes both in England and in the Sundarbans. Strikingly, the

⁶ According to de Souza's edition, the first verse paragraph of the poem ends after line 18. As this paragraph break is in mid-sentence, and what is more, the next two lines form a closing heroic couplet, there must be a mistake here, and I assume that the opening section of the poem is supposed to end with the "sullen tiger's hoarse [and resounding] 'ragum'" in line 20.

speaker insists that all these things "[r]ivet [the sailor's] fancy, and still fan the dream / The waste before him is a mighty park" (ll. 52/53), and while "waste" points to untamed nature and, possibly, a Romantic engagement with it, the neoclassical "mighty park" is clearly qualified as a mere "dream." Nevertheless, the section returns to these images of longing and suggests that should "perchance [the sailor's] eyes one moment miss" the "gentle uplands and the white chalk cliffs" of England (l. 54/55), the "graceful palm [...] / With its rich tuft of leaves like drooping plumes, / And clusters strange of green and golden nuts" can compensate him for his "loss" (ll. 56-8).

What is presented as mere compensation at the end of the third section becomes an outright lure and fascination in the fourth and final part of the poem (ll. 59-84). Obliquely, the impersonal speaker describes "him who slowly follows in a boat, / The lazy mazes of the [sylvan solitude's] tidal streams" (ll. 59-61), who may well be the English stranger introduced before. In a strange mixture of exploration and proto-tourism, the landscape will 'afford to him' (ll. 59/60) "[i]n shrewd November, that delicious draught / Of genuine pleasure, that rewards the toil of keen explorers" (ll. 62-4), and for quite a while he can observe how civilisation has claimed the wilderness through "squatter's toil" (l. 68), hunting (l. 72) and fishing (ll. 75) until he reaches the

jungle deep,
Where not one single sign of man appears,
(Not e'en a rude built trap of unbarked logs
Of knotted soondri, ponderous as lead,
Among the thickets on the river's brink)
At shut of eve, while on the cabin roof
His haunch of fen deer smokes 'mid charcoal gleams,
[when he] Prepare[s] to anchor for the night his craft.
(de Souza, 55-7, ll. 77-84)

Just like the perception of the wilderness of the Sundarbans was from the beginning framed by neoclassical (and, to a lesser extent, Romantic) poetic conventions, so the wilderness itself is framed by exploration and colonisation, and the poem ends just on the brink of actual untouched wilderness.

This shift from a tentative emancipation and validation of Indian reality into an outright endorsement of the coloniser's perspective is again indicated by a marked but unidentified quotation. Unlike the reference to Keats at the end of "Vizagapatam," however, the quote 'mid charcoal gleams' does not introduce an explicitly reflexive turn. Instead, it fully acknowledges the dominance of the coloniser's rather un-Romantic Enlightenment perspective on Indian reality by drawing on Reginald Heber's *Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India: From Calcutta to Bombay*, which first came out in 1826 and then in a second edition with John Murray in London in 1828. Heber (1783-1826) was a clergyman and writer of hymns who also had a reputation as a poet and a travel writer. He ended his career as the Anglican Bishop of Calcutta from 1823 to his early death, aged 42, in 1826, and the journey described in his *Narrative* was undertaken in 1824 and 25. The quotation in Greece Chunder Dutt's "The Soonderbuns" is actually

from the poem "An Evening Walk in Bengal" which is included in the *Narrative* and posthumously made it into his *Poetical Works* (Philadelphia: E.H. Butler, 1857). The original context for the quotation runs as follows:

Our task is done! On Gunga's breast
The sun is sinking down to rest;
And, moored beneath the tamarind bough,
Our bark has found its harbour now.
With furled sail, and painted side,
Behold the tiny frigate ride.
Upon her deck, 'mid charcoal gleams,
The Moslem's savoury supper steams,
While all apart, beneath the wood,
The Hindoo cooks his simpler food.
[...]
(Heber 1828 I, 245, ll. 1-10)

While there are in fact many parallels between "An Evening Walk in Bengal" and "The Soonderbuns" in terms of their reliance on poetic conventions which are mostly neoclassical, it is striking that where Heber at least tries to record the specifics of the Indian reality he encounters on his walk (which at any rate does not take place on the threshold to actual wilderness as Dutt's, but in more civilised regions of Bengal), Dutt obliterates these specifics to the point of completely depopulating the inner Sundarbans ("Where not one single sign of man appears," l. 78), while in fact the source text for his quote at least acknowledges the presence of the inhabitants of the region with their various religions, cultures and customs. What this does to possible reading angles on "The Soonderbuns" is hard to decide: While an ironical reading of the poem as a critique of the obliteration of Indian reality in English (poetic) discourse is not completely inconceivable, it is also possible that the poem has been unwittingly assimilated into this very discourse in the poet's attempt at appropriating and finding a place in it.

5. Private Spaces: Baumaree

In stark contrast to the fairly abstract reflexivity of "Vizagapatam" and the uneasy positioning of "The Soonderbuns," Toru Dutt's "Sonnet – Baumaree" has been hailed by Amit Chaudhuri (and many others) as "the first artistically satisfying example of those texts in Indian writing in English that occupy the space between translation and transformation" (Chaudhuri 2001, n.p.). So what does this poem do that the other two poems addressed in this essay fail to do? Here is the full text:

A sea of foliage girds our garden round,
But not a sea of dull unvaried green,
Sharp contrasts of all colours here are seen;
The light-green graceful tamarinds abound
Amid the mangoe clumps of green profound,
And palms arise, like pillars gray, between;
And o'er the quiet pools the seemuls lean,

Red – red, and startling like a trumpet's sound.
But nothing can be lovelier than the ranges
Of bamboos to the eastward, when the moon
Looks through their gaps, and the white lotus changes
Into a cup of silver. One might swoon
Drunken with beauty then, or gaze and gaze
On a primeval Eden, in amaze.
(de Souza 2010, 111)

Obviously, the chosen combination of formal features from the Italian (ll. 1-8: abba abba) and the English sonnet traditions (ll. 9-14: cdcd ee) in itself testifies to a greater aesthetic ambition than the straightforward stanzas of "Vizagapatam" and the expository blank verse of "The Soonderbuns," both in terms of formal discipline and required closure. In terms of voice, however, it is striking that in "Baumaree" Toru Dutt is as reluctant as her father and uncle in their poems to establish an explicit speaking 'I.' Instead, the speaker is only obliquely hinted at in the first line ("our garden") and then vanishes from sight completely only to resurface in the generalised "One" at the end of the poem (l. 12). Nevertheless, "our garden" indicates a more personal speaking position and a private sphere that is completely absent from the two other poems. And what is more, this sphere of private experience is clearly marked as different from the English norms of landscape and nature description that were still so dominant in the earlier poems but are summarily dismissed in "Baumaree" as "a sea of dull and unvaried green" (l. 2). The Indian sea of foliage in the speaker's garden, on the other hand, is marked by "Sharp contrasts of all colours" (l. 3) and moves from "light green" (l. 4) through "green profound" (l. 5) to "gray" (l. 6), "red" (l. 8), "white" (l. 11) and "silver" (l. 12). The striking synaesthetic interruption at the centre of the poem (ll. 7/8) is characteristically triggered by the intrusion of the word "seemul" (l. 7), the local Bangla expression for the red silk cotton tree with its trumpet-shaped blossoms, a "startling [...] sound" (l. 8) in English indeed which disturbs the "quiet pools" (l. 7) of customary English poetic diction and vision and, as the material origin of a poetic image, emancipates a specifically Indian reality as a source for poetry.

But even beyond this, the interruption of the poem's flow indeed "startles" with its resonance," as Amit Chaudhuri (2001, n.p.) points out, and it does so in various registers. Nora A. Phillips for example suggests in an ingenuous reading of the poem that in these lines,

despite Dutt's depiction of the Indian garden as an exclusively Eastern space, the British martial presence in India intrudes through the variegated boundary and explodes into the poem. [...] Dutt's invocation of the shrill trumpet, strongly associated with British military exercises, in the midst of her description of her Indian Eden, brings the otherwise fluid poem to an abrupt halt. The imposition, however, is surprisingly transient and Dutt moves with lightning speed to subordinate the trumpet's interruption. (Phillips 2007, paragraph 3)

And on yet another level Chaudhuri himself insists that besides the literal origin of the image in the trumpet-shaped blossoms of a local tree, which are depicted as part of a larger and specifically Indian flora and fauna of tamarinds (l. 4), mangoes

(l. 5), palms (l. 6), bamboos (l. 10) and lotus flowers (l. 11), another decentring of the English poetic tradition also comes into play:

The sort of simile that Dutt uses, in which a colour is compared to sound, is unusual in English poetry. It shows Dutt's reading in the poetry of the French Symbolists. [...] [I]n the business of 'finding their voice,' of both using English and exploring new territory, [Indian writers in English] turn to, and have at their disposal, a variety of languages and literary traditions. (Chaudhuri 2001)

So while, as opposed to D.L. Richardson's westward look in "Evening on the Banks of the Ganges," the speaker's gaze in "Baugmaree" is clearly directed to the east (l. 10), which holds the promise of a "primeval Eden" (l. 14), the poem is well aware of all its Western influences, negative and positive, and uses them in order to demarcate and emancipate its own individual voice which expands its own emphatic perceptions into a universal 'One' by means of poetic form. What the poem does that the other two poems fail to do, then, is to make full use of the emergent realm of modern literature beyond the confines of national boundaries and conventions: There is room here for an individual engagement with the world that transcends its own individuality towards a more general cultural authority and validity, and that absorbs the coloniser's intrusion and merges it with an outlook that manages, somewhat paradoxically, to be more personal and more cosmopolitan (in a new, post-Romantic sense) at the same time.

6. Conclusion

In terms of their creative encounter with the Other of the English poetic tradition, then, the three poems under scrutiny here seem to occupy different positions on a scale covering mimicry, hybridity and identity (cf. Stilz 1999). While Greece Chunder Dutt's "The Soonderbuns" is almost completely caught up in its mimicry of available modes of English poetic representation from the neoclassical through the sublime to, barely, the Romantic, and thus ends up re-enacting the coloniser's perceptions in the medium of poetic voice, Govin Chunder Dutt's "Vizagapatam" is interesting in that it moves beyond its mimicry of the flights of the Romantic imagination as captured in English Romantic voices towards a hybrid sphere of reflexivity which is triggered by the ultimate shared human reality of death. Toru Dutt's "Sonnet – Baugmaree," finally, employs (and to a certain degree: mimics) a "stalwartly Western form" (Phillips 2007, paragraph 3) to establish a hybrid space (Indian reality, English poetry, French symbolism) that ultimately enables her to forge an identity that is firmly grounded in her personal experience of 'being from the East.' At the same time, this identity is fully absorbed into the emergent paradigm of post-Romantic modern poetry even to the point of anticipating the later cosmopolitanism of modernism. "Baugmaree" thus poses an interesting question: Does modern (Western) literature establish the possibility of a higher-order mimicry that covers all three dimensions of (lower-order) mimicry, hybridity and identity, and then emancipates itself through its intriguing mixture of personal relevance, public resonance, emphatic self-validation and

reflexivity? Perhaps it does – but this has remained contested ground to this day, and the whiff of cultural imperialism that comes with it has been criticised time and again.

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