

The Road Not Taken: Anita Desai and Her Work

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Abstract

The present paper explores the modernist experiments in Anita Desai's work and looks at her narrative themes. There is a rare continuity in her thematic concerns even if her characters take different routes. The writer picks up an alternative route that her characters could have travelled. It is as if they have a second chance to live their life again. This unveils their loneliness and sense of failure in all its darkness; it is as if they really have no choice as each successive exploration compels them to pare themselves to the barest minimum. Despite being independent novels they are woven together by the thematic journey which moves on relentlessly towards similar goals constantly inviting the reader to travel alongside and realise the inevitability of loneliness.

Keywords: Pattern; Real; Truth

Nearly a decade ago, when Anita Desai was invited to be a fellow of the Akademi, I was one of three people invited to talk about her. I wrote that essay in November 2007 in the winter of the hills (Shimla), titled 'How Strangeness Takes Possession', where I had focused on *The Zigzag Way* (2004)¹ taking it as an entry point. I am grateful to the Akademi for providing me with another occasion to participate in this retrospect of the writer's work. Let me confess, I have been sorely tempted to label this presentation 'Anita and Me' for we have had a long relationship as writer and reader, and are near contemporaries with Meenakshi Mukherjee in between. And we have been exposed to the same political and social environment. I first met Desai in 1978 when we invited her for a seminar. Desai was working on *Clear Light of Day* and chose to read an extract from it. The next morning she took a trip to Amer all by herself probably with a mind to capture some images for her future writing. It was an indication of the link she continually establishes between the external and the internal landscapes. A year or so later, she wrote to say she'd like to come to Jaipur to do some shopping. As I happened to be abroad, my husband received her and made the arrangements. My full length book on her work, perhaps the very first on her, came out in 1987 (written during the summer of '86): *Stairs to the Attic*. It grappled with an

image prominent in her novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* and metaphorically entered the hidden world of individual consciousness. Three novels later, the work called for a revision (The second revised edition came out in 1997). In between there have been other writings and interviews which constantly insist on a review of her work.

Today I ask the question: How does one read Desai's work? Do we treat each novel as a self-contained aesthetic unit or do we look at it as an overflowing or a rewriting of a previous exploration? In one of her interviews she preferred the word 'pattern' to 'structure'.² While structure includes the temporal organisation, pattern indicates a focused journey. This pattern can be seen as a chessboard on which the figures move in a certain manner and each different move changes the direction of the game. Her fictional pattern can easily be classified into two streams: the family novel and the loner novel. *Voices in the City*, *Clear Light of Day* and *Fasting, Feasting* are clearly family novels dealing with sibling relationships, others - *Baumgartner's Bombay*, *Journey to Ithaca*, *The Zigzag Way* are clearly loner novels as is the 'The Artist of Disappearance'. As she moves these patterns on the chess board, there is many a division, a shift and a move into a hitherto unexplored area. They are very different contextually, politically and psychologically and as such defy being placed in a pattern. They resist being clustered under a single description, yet the meaning in isolation is an incomplete statement in itself, leaving open the query: How does one read Desai's work? It is multi-layered, often works through contraries (not necessarily polarisations), looks at eccentricities and unaccounted ways of behaviour. And across the two main divisions there are multiple crossings compelling one to relate them and read them contrapuntally just as the writer has worked through them. Edward Said in his essay 'Secular Criticism' observes that this goes beyond the hermeneutic approach in its concern with 'existential activities of human life', politics, societies and events. These, he continues, include realities of power and authority as well as resistances offered by men and women and movements to institutions and orthodoxies - are the realities that made these texts possible³. Contrapuntal has several resonances and carries both centripetal and centrifugal movements. In Desai's writing contrapuntally runs across her novels and characters. Mira Masi returns as a different character in *Fasting, Feasting* and again, in 'The Artist of Disappearance' as Miss Wilkinson, the British indigent of today. Cats also travel from one novel to another. Baumgartner's cats resurface in 'The Artist of Disappearance'. Are they a substitute for human companionship? Again the pursuit of art is never far from her characters even if private and contrary.

It is here that I wish to bring in Gerald Prince's essay 'The Disnarrated' Prince approaches the topic via the notion of tellability.⁴ And while Desai's use of language is full of descriptive and guiding adjectives, it is also full of silences and camouflages, warning us constantly to move beyond the word. The 'word' is important but not necessarily reliable. It is subject to constant change in meaning, in spatio-temporal contexts and the flow of time in the location of both the writer and the reader. Any reader of long standing needs only to reflect on the changing interpretations of the term narrative. The written work is stable in its printed (and now often digitalised) form but this is not true of the writer and the reader. The writer has continued a journey, accumulating more experiences, adding on more layers and the reader has also changed, encountering other realities and ideologies. A question which cannot be easily sidestepped is whether there is an inclusion of the contemporary in these perspectives. Are social issues also being addressed? Are the political realities such as religious conflicts, Hindu-Muslim relations, the politics of separation (Partition), the controversies over language and its survival and ecological and environmental issues also woven in?

Each successive novel is an attempt to travel 'the road not taken'⁵ to get beyond the observable reality. Prince's essay points towards several directions which the disnarrated or the unnarratable can take: language can be one with its closedness, meaning can be another as it is hidden or double layered, and silence, in itself, can be a third; interruptions and gaps in the narrative also point towards the disnarrated as do the multiple possibilities of action - the so-called crossroads, where the various trajectories besiege the characters and the readers are pushed into working with the relationship with narrative logic. The disnarrated has an ongoing relationship with several literary movements. Though critics have associated it mainly with modernist and postmodernist movements, it is also present in early realism and the gothic.⁶ The road not taken is an implied alternative to the narrated story - the alternatives present in it. Though it is often associated with psychological and political repression, it also opens out the agency of the character in the possibilities of action. Here, I am, however, connecting it with the writer's persisting concerns as the unsaid of one protagonist is played out again in another narrative world.

And while my focus is on the loner novels, the recurring pattern in the family novels also deserves some attention, where the sibling relationship is worked out differently. *Clear Light of Day*, *Voices in the City* and *Fasting, Feasting* each has one dysfunctional sibling whether it is Baba in *Clear Light of Day* and Arun, the absent brother in *Voices*, or Aruna the beautiful sister who gets married and is sacrificed in *Fasting, Feasting*. One needs to note

that Baba and Arun are opposites- one is incapable of the normal, the other is 'normal' in the worldly sense. He has fitted into the social pattern, as has Aruna in *Fasting, Feasting*. Mira Masi who drinks herself first into hallucinations and then death in *Clear Light of Day*, resurfaces as Mira Masi, the eternal pilgrim in *Fasting, Feasting*, as if pilgrimages are a better antidote to widowhood. Then there is the aunt in *Voices in the City*, the one with whom Amla stays. Different from her mountain- charmed sister, she, like the Mira Masis of the other two novels, provides a comfort zone. The parental figures in both *Clear Light of Day* and *Fasting, Feasting* follow a similar pattern though the degree of their visibility is different. Both sets of parents have an additional child late in their life. Is Arun in *Fasting, Feasting* a reworking of Baba of *Clear Light of Day*?

Read in chronological order, these novels represent a declining graph of family life as well as the possible courses of happiness as even locales are experimented with. The 'harshness' of Calcutta is repeatedly commented upon in *Voices*. Dharma, the painter-artist moves out of the city, Monisha moves towards self-annihilation, and Nirode aspires to failure. A poet and an editor, his constant attempt is to minimize the use of words, to keep chiseling at them, to move towards silences. Written during the period of Beckett and Borges, Nirode's life is a pursuit of failure.⁷ Anita Desai has often referred to the influence of western writers on her writing – first the modernist British writers - Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence and the rest and later the *European* writers. Time and again she has expressed her interest in the eccentric, the misfit and the exile. In an interview, with Joshua Barnes, she has pointed out, 'I am interested in people who live in a kind of an exile from the rest of society, people who don't go along with the mainstream, who live outside the current or are stranded while everyone else just flows along'.⁸ At another point, in a conversation with Corinne Demos, she used the term 'against' the current'.⁹ There is a slight difference in the two terms, if one examines them critically. While the first 'don't go along with the mainstream' implies unwillingness, a certain inability and passivity, 'against the current' implies a willful rebellion. And as one turns to the 'loner' novels and the spillover from Baba and Nirode into Deven, Hugo, Eric and Ravi, the difference claims its own attention. Even in *Voices* Dharma's exit from the city is in sharp contrast to Nirode's surrender to its cruelty.

Why does the writer feel compelled over and over again to return to similar frameworks? Does this compulsion lie in what has just been completed or said or in some other agency? Is it necessitated by a psychological probing by shifting environmental possibilities? Would Baba have been different if his parents had been alive and if had been given the benefit of education?

Would Bim, had she not struggled to educate herself and by employed, been like a giggling middle-aged woman trying to find some escape? The contrast between Maya (*Cry, the Peacock*) and Monisha (*Voices*) is carried over to later novels. While one commits murder due to an obsessive attachment, the other commits suicide in her pursuit of a forced detachment. There is a scene in *Voices* - I call it a scene because of its strong imagist evocation – **where** Monisha wildly signals of Amla to go in the ‘opposite’ direction (*Voices* 160). But it is not geographically defined, it has emotional connotations.

One cannot easily dismiss this as psychological experiment or a writer’s fancy. Often enough the words ‘real’ and ‘truth’ occur in Desai’s interviews as well as in her novels. These rewritings are overwritings, erasers and recordings as Desai moves from one novel to another in search of the ‘real’. Surprisingly, in the theoretical formulations of failure, gender is not a sign of difference.. Nanda Kaul’s life in retrospect bears close resemblance to Deven’s. Desai’s interviews except for the comment on *Clear Light of Day*, that it is her most autobiographical work,¹⁰ are exceptionally reticent about her personal life. It is only in an interview given to Kiran Desai that we learn of a personal loss. Kiran mentions the loss of her father. But for the rest all personal conflicts and losses are passed on to her characters, not directly but filtered through a writerly distance. The repetitions, the replays and the explorations of the byways are ultimately linked to a writer’s search for meaning. They are an attempt to capture the ‘real’ which repeatedly eludes one. Shadow, mirage, fantasy or the unreal- what is the ‘real’? If real repeatedly eludes us, and escapes words, we are perhaps compelled to search for it in patterns and structures in addition to the words. Desai’s language with its detailed descriptions of flora and fauna, of the surroundings, detailing every little line in the scenery, serves as a camouflage, weaving a labyrinth of its own. At times, her sentences are more than a page long (*Zigzag Way* 17-18). Language is used as a distraction as well as an entry point into the hidden crevices of time.

It is this search for lost meanings and missed turnings that sends the writer to the same ground. Desai, through her interest in the eccentric, aligns herself with the early modernist or pre-modernist writers – with Gogol and Dostoevsky – and the metaphor of madness. Maya, in *Cry, the Peacock*, and Matteo in *Journey to Ithaca* move away from seemingly rational positions. Their narratives lie in-between between the family and the loner novels. *Journey to Ithaca* has multiple narratives woven together. Matteo’s search is for the ‘real’, Sophie’s is for the truth of the Mother’s past, and the Mother’s is a journey of transformation from Laila to Lila and finally the Mother. Each of the three is possessed by a personal obsession to know the truth.

While Mother's biographical journey links the two narratives of Matteo and Sophie – the travels of Matteo and Sophie are incomplete in themselves – Matteo's desire is wholly internal and Sophie's that of an observer and an outsider. When the novel came out in 2009, it was in the long run of the 'Guru' and Ashram novels. Suddenly several novels came out on similar themes – an exotic mix of the physical and the spiritual – and thus for many of us, its true meaning was lost. In any case, it is slow to open out at other levels as well. The contrast between East and West in sharp colours, places it within a stereotype. But re-readings reveal the difference. Right at the beginning, C.P. Cavafy's poem and the quote from Milan Kundera's *Immortality* set the tone. Cavafy's advice is to travel slowly, to linger at every port, to learn and learn; and not to hurry, to concentrate on the voyage – it alone has meaning, the end has nothing to give, and the epigraph from *Immortality* is about the realisation: 'things exist in their essence even before they are materially realised and named.'

The narrative flows through discontinuities, through sluices of time, back and forth, through juxtapositions and leaps. It opens with Matteo lying ill in a hospital in India and Sophie's arrival as if to rescue him. But he refuses to be 'rescued'. Quickly the scene shifts to Europe (Milan) to Matteo's parents and to his children who play games of being Buddha and his worshipper. Equally swiftly we enter Matteo's childhood and his reading of Herman Hesse's *The Journey to the East*. There is a similar flitting to and fro throughout the novel, at times difficult to relate to and a constant movement in different geographical spaces, defying stability or any affiliation with place. *Journey to Ithaca* is slow, meandering, often confused, often missing the right turns and having to go back, both for the characters and the readers. Desai doesn't stay long with any narrative mode – realistic, spiritual, exotic, fantasy – they all spill over constantly into each other.. It is one novel in which the 'road not taken' is explored within simultaneities.

In this search for faith, one is often alone when even in company. He felt alone among the believers – 'a kind of leper amongst them' (75). He felt he could not continue to love if he could not have a vision of spiritual truth (76). Without a vision, he could not see, could not understand. It is then that he comes across an old man and as he watched him lay offerings at a stone lodged in the roots of a banyan tree, Matteo stood and stared and then 'as he continued to gaze at it, he saw that what was perfectly balanced there in a cleft was not a stone at all but a circle, and it contained within it another circle, and another, and there was no beginning and no end to them; they were infinite: they were infinity'. And he too could see the divine light (78). Is this the connection between the inner mind and the external world that Matteo is looking for? Is it the truth he is searching? But the truth of the

forest does not necessarily dwell in all ashrams. Laila has experienced disillusionment, as does Matteo later. There is a critiquing of the false lords and the dancer Krishna, inclined towards the sensuous and the world of appearances.

Laila's life presents a close study of the movement of dance, of its lightness and oneness with body, as it also opens on the ugly world of make-belief when colours and lights cleverly manage to camouflage the cheap and the fake. But Laila needs to escape from both her lives – that of Laila as well as that of Lila. And it is from this compulsion within her that Laila gathers courage to escape Egypt, to get away from Krishna, to recognise the false and pursue the unknown. They are loners of a different kind but engaged in similar pursuits across gender and culture. And there is an equal madness in their journeys – fascination, longing to go across, grappling with the mysteries of a different religion and then hallucinations. Matteo is almost drowned in the sea where 'he had gone bathing at high tide, insisting it was the holy Ganga' (80) But the gods in India can be destructive (81). Matteo's experiences stumble from one incident to another as the fake disillusion him. The Bihar ashram disillusion him with its greed and worldliness and its acts of adharma. And this compels Matteo to move yet again to another ashram where he experiences unity of the spiritual with the physical, the dark with the light, the human with the natural' (111). But himself divided between two worlds, the physical and the spiritual, Sophie and the Mother, he is restless and constantly awaiting for the peace that he aspires to descend on him and the truth he longs to experience. And then, one day, he saw the Mother seated on a rock in the garden – 'The scene was utterly extraordinary to him.... It might have been called unreal, but why? Why not reality heightened and raised to a level he had not experienced before but was now revealed as what it might be and could be?' (125).

But Sophie is skeptical. For her it was the outer world that was 'real' one with its poverty, ugliness and starvation (169). Sophie is uneasy, unable to 'sleep for hate'. She hates both Matteo and the Mother, but she has also come to hate the world outside and tossed between these two kinds of hatred, she seeks escape (171). This experience has taught her to look at all rituals critically (173) and once again move to India in search of the truth about the Mother, to go behind the legend. Each one of the three pilgrims – Matteo, Sophie and the Mother – struggles with doubts, divisions and forms of knowing in their personal search for the different 'truths' they are looking for.

The journeys in *The Zigzag Way* are different and also differently located. The travels take place from America to Mexico, from England to Mexico and cross twice over as they travel across three generations, as political histories

are explored and as developmental processes in their exploitation of nature are opened out, and the Mexican Revolution and the two World Wars enter the narrative. The narrative as such is anchored in the theme of immigration. Eric has written his thesis on the subject and now on a fellowship to expand it into a book, is looking for ideas. It is in this period of emptiness that he wants to accompany Em, his partner, who is a scientist and is planning to go to the Mexican forests for research with her colleagues. *The Zigzag Way* is one novel which begins in the present and step by step descends into the past. Words like 'clumsy' and 'blundered' are used to describe him. He is diffident, unsure of himself. His parents had long 'recognised the awkwardness of having a misfit for a son' (16), And even when he accompanies Em and her colleagues, he looks upon them as people who are certain and sure. He has convinced himself 'that scientists were fascinating people: they knew the human being... as no one else did....' (22) But they had no stories – stories were what lived around one. Eric's journey to Mexico, despite its beginnings in a sense of emptiness gradually transforms itself into a search for meaning of the past. His father has been born there; he has a faint memory of a visit to England to his grandparents in Cornwall. His grandfather had worked in the mines of Mexico – the silver mines – and the title of the novel is acquired from the miner's burden. The porters carry a weight of nearly two hundred pounds and 'in ascending the stairs; they throw their bodies forwards and rest on a staff. They walk in a zigzag direction because they have found from experience that their respiration is less impeded when they traverse obliquely the currents of air...' (79). The manner in which memories travel and make connections is equally indirect. There is no linear passage. In fact, very often Desai uses the word 'scramble'. When a song, a tune, an ornament knock on his mind, 'His mind scrambled, as if on its knees, to recover the images they had once configured' (32). And the images that he recovers are of a fireside in an English cottage and his grandfather talking to him of the Mexican experience, the mines, the hills and the gold. And as Dona Vera talks of what the mines had done to the habitat of the Huichol Indians, the childhood memories are resurrected. Another journey begins now, an inward journey, linked with the outside world, another story of immigration, of travel across seas. Dona Vera has also travelled in more than one way – across countries, across positions – from a dancehall performer to a position of power- and across ideologies, a woman who married into a family of mine-owners but was now denouncing their exploitative tendencies. The shift is from adventure and newness to possession and power; it is also from employment to environment.

Hidden in the folds of time are other travels – Eric's grandfather David who came to Mexico, Betty, his grandmother who followed him to marry him

and died during childbirth, the child Paul taken back home to his grandparents and Paul's journey to America. Finally, when Eric begins a search for his grandmother's grave, the journeys meet completing a circle, journeys where history is a dominant player – invasions, wars, revolutions and economic distress. Desai's epigraphs spread generously in the novel fill in on the Mexican past right from the sixteenth century onwards. Amidst these conflicts the past comes alive as Eric searches for Betty's grave and she rises up to meet her son – Paul. Instead it is not Paul but Eric and Betty comments 'Everyone comes from somewhere else.... like Mexicans, they came from Asia' (176). It is not only the connectivity of the past with the present, of the living with the dead, but also of space as travelers journey to different lands. In the course of the novel, Em and her scientist friends are left on the wayside. *The Zigzag Way* is Eric's journey to his own past and a possible way out of his emptiness. Pilgrims all, in search of the peyote cactus. *The Zigzag Way* is a tightly crafted narrative with an aura of magic and mystery. To some extent it is a carryover from the pilgrimages of Matteo and the Mother. They have moved away from the visible world of reality, to some inner connectivity and knowledge, redefining the 'real' in inward terms – of peace, of relationships, of connecting with someone, of stepping outside one's inner uncertainty.

The Artist of Disappearance – the book – consists of three stories, each about a loner – the son who travels and goes on sending art pieces home but never comes back home in 'The Museum of Final Journeys', the woman teacher Prema who is isolated because of the language she works with in 'Translated', while her classmate has a comfortable niche in the publishing world, and Ravi the boy who grows up in the hills in 'The Artist of Disappearance'. It is the last I want to discuss. Ravi is in the long line of the loners which had begun with Nirode in *Voices*. His childhood is akin to the childhoods of Bim and her siblings in *Clear Light of Day*, except that Ravi has no siblings. His existence is tied up with the hills and when he is sent to Bombay to his uncle, he detests the place. Like Nirode and Dharma, the harshness of urban life assaults his senses and the narrative opens with short sentences: 'Nobody climbed that hill anymore. Not unless they wished to retreat. It was a good place for that: a retreat. Just the burnt-out remains of the house that stood there' (95). It is a carryover from *Fire on the Mountain* which ends with a forest fire. In that novel Nanda Kaul had sought a retreat after her life full of mechanical domestic and social tasks and with her family now sprawling into four generations. But the occupant of this burnt house is only Ravi with Miss Wilkinson moved to the hospital where she dies of her burns.

This abandoned house has a sole occupant, who lived in one of the salvaged rooms, slept on a cot and led a hermit's life, his sole connection being with

the erstwhile chowkidar Bhola and his family. As the novel opens, he comes and sits on the steps, an everyday habit and listens to the cowherds. As two young boys come to him, Ravi asks – speaking in a voice that had almost rusted for lack of use, ‘Have they gone?’ His reference is to the visiting team of documentary makers who had wanted to contact him. He was the artist who had created a paradise on a part of the hill. The film crew by losing the track they had been following, almost by chance sighted this garden and reacted to it with admiration and surprise: ‘How could anything man-made surpass the Himalayas themselves, the flow of hills from the plains to the snows, mounting from light into cloud into sky?’ (144)

But on learning that the film people are interested in meeting him, Ravi goes into hiding. Bhola who understands him lends him his own clothes and takes him into his own house. Forever cast out of his garden, his very own enclosure, Ravi is in an inner wilderness. He knew he would never go there again. It too would revert to wilderness (152). A substitute is found in storing little objects in empty matchboxes which he could keep hidden from other eyes. He shuns communication, finds peace in his own hidden secretive possessions and continues to hide, working towards anonymity and invisibility. The film crew thinks ‘perhaps he doesn’t exist’ (154). If not the beautiful garden, then what? The crew finds a contrary ending in the explosions on the hillside, followed by men busy excavating limestone. Like *The Zigzag Way*, the beauty of nature, the majesty of the mountains is violated by the human urge to use everything for survival. Can human life continue to be without being exploitative, selfish and brutal?

All Desai’s novels carry an undercurrent of violence and the failed act of communication. Nirode is a writer, Dharma a painter, Raja and Deven both lovers of poetry and poets-in-making, Eric is looking for ideas for his book and Ravi, the hermit builds himself a secret garden. Deven’s act of recording the interview with the great poet and establishing a line of communication across time fails. In each work the writer turns to the road not taken in order to probe deeper into the human consciousness and its desires that thrive or perish in a world of contradictions. ‘The Artist of Disappearance’ refines this struggle to the barest minimum when Ravi’s artistry is turned into secrecy and invisibility. There is communication through negation, the denial of society, the moving back to the rural and to the barest necessities of life. Is utilization through its brutality, sending us back to the basics of existence? Can humanity survive in the world that is now taking shape where all little fish are being swallowed by the big? What are the choices in this world of contradictory pulls when relationships project a dismal picture? The real that emerges from Desai’s novels is private, unnarratable, not vested either in stereotype parents, or in the institution of marriage. The individual is all alone caught as he is in the contradictions of life.

As story after story moves to different surroundings and landscapes, several things remain the same – the non-communication of the human emotions and responses, the fragility of art as a support structure, the on-going conflict between the external and the internal, and amidst all this the truth that we still do not exist alone. It is in relationship – unfulfilled, failed or half-sprung – that we live. There are unending possibilities to the choices open to us, choices we reject or narrow down.

Notes

¹ *The Zigzag Way* (2004).

² In 'A Conversation with Anita Desai', interview with Corinne Demos, Desai says 'I don't think I ever planned the structure of a book, I think the material imposes the structure on it'. And later she says, 'I think of structure as pattern really' (35-36).

³ Edward Said 'Secular Criticism' in *The World, The Text and The Critic* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983). 1-30.5. For more details refer *Edward Said's Translocations* Eds. Tobias Doring and Mark Stein. New York, Routledge, 2012, where several of Said's concepts are debated by many writers.

⁴ Gerald Prince, 'The Disnarrated', *Style* 2201 (Spring 1988), 1-8. Also refer Sudha Shastri's excellent introduction to the edited volume *Disnarrated: The Unsaid Matters*, where Shastri not only opens out Prince's article but also supplements it by her references to the work of Laura Karttunen and differentiates the disnarrated from intertextual.

⁵ I have borrowed the title of this paper from the seminar held at IIT, Mumbai, organised by Sudha Shastri in 2013.

⁶ Refer Maurie-Laura Ryan *Possible, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory*. Bloomington: Indiana U.P 1991.

⁷ Refer Boris Ford edited volume *The Present* and the article by Gabriel Josipovici 'Samuel Beckett: the Need to Fail'.

⁸ Joshua Barnes, '“You Turn Yourself into an Outsider”: An Interview' with Anita Desai; Desai acknowledges the influence of British writers in the early years and goes on to add 'I am interested in people who live in a kind of exile from the rest of society..... who don't go along with the mainstream, who go against the current, who live outside the current and are stranded while everyone else just flows along' Internet reference.

⁹ Corinne Demos 'Against the current: A conversation with Anita Desai' in *Anita Desai: Critical Perspectives*.

¹⁰ 'Kiran Desai in Conversation with Anita Desai' *The Guardian*. In this interview Kiran refers to the loss of her father and Anita Desai makes a reference to Borges. Kiran observes Anita Desai's work contains a great deal of violence and tremendous frustration and unhappiness.

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