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Alienation and isolation of the characters in Anita Desai's novels *Fire on the Mountain*, *The Village By The Sea*, *Fasting Feasting* and in the collection of short stories *Games at Twilight*

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► **To cite this version:**

Gabrielle Cubillé. Alienation and isolation of the characters in Anita Desai's novels *Fire on the Mountain*, *The Village By The Sea*, *Fasting Feasting* and in the collection of short stories *Games at Twilight*. Literature. 2012. dumas-00929936

HAL Id: dumas-00929936

<https://dumas.ccsd.cnrs.fr/dumas-00929936>

Submitted on 14 Jan 2014

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**Alienation and isolation of the characters in Anita Desai's
novels *Fire on the Mountain*, *The Village By The Sea*,
Fasting, Feasting and in the collection of short stories
Games at Twilight.**

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UFR D'ETUDES ANGLOPHONES

Mémoire de master 1 recherche

Spécialité ou Parcours : PLC

Sous la direction de Mrs Madhu Benoit

Année universitaire 2011-2012

Acknowledgement

This essay could not have been written without the support of Mrs Madhu Benoit, who directed my work. I would like to thank her a lot for all the information she gave me, her patience, her support and her good spirits. I also want to thank her for the very interesting courses she gave last year (Maitrise de la langue on India, and post-colonial literature): they guided my choices for this essay and they increased my interest for India, this fascinating country.

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Introduction

The subject of Anita Desai's fiction has, thus far, been solitude. Her most memorable creations—the old woman, Nanda Kaul, in *Fire on the Mountain*, or Bim in *Clear Light of Day*—have been isolated, singular figures. And the books themselves have been private universes, illuminated by the author's perceptiveness, delicacy of language and sharp wit, but remaining, in a sense, as solitary, as separate, as their characters. (Rusdie 71)

Salman Rushdie, the Indian novelist, evokes here his admiration for Anita Desai, an Indian novelist too, who presents in her “private universes” characters which are shaped by “the moods and events of the circumstances.”¹ She uses imageries in her writing and mainly imagination to mould her characters. Following Rushdie's idea, we can say that she portrays her characters with a great sensitiveness, especially female characters and their thoughts. She also talks about the life of middle class women who live without kinship with other people, and the discord within families.² She said: “My style of writing is to allow the story to unfold on its own. I try not to structure my work too rigidly.”³ The structure of her works can embody the freedom that the characters do not have but at the same time – according to Rushdie – Anita Desai's books are “as solitary, as separate as their characters.” Thus we can venture to say that her novels are unique, expressing freedom and solitude. “Anita Desai's work is a part of a new style of writing, which came out of less conservative writings of India as Indian writings have been in the past.”⁴

Let us give a little information about her life: Anita Desai was born in India on 24 June 1937 of a German mother and Bengali father and that gave her a double heritage, cultural and racial. She studied at Queen Mary's Higher Secondary School, then in Delhi at Miranda House. In 1963, her first novel *Cry, the Peacock* was published. Later in 1978, she won the Winifred Holtby Award for Regional literature of the Royal Society of Literature, London, and the Sahitya Akademi Award for English for her novel *Fire on the Mountain*. At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, she also teaches a Writing Program.

With her intellectual and cultural knowledge, we understand why Anita Desai is called “la grande dame des lettres” by Denise Coussy (professor at the University of Le Mans), and

¹ Anita Desai, Indian Writer. 28 Feb. 2012. 21 June 2012. <http://www.indianetzone.com/4/anita_desai.htm>

² Ibid.

³ "Anita Desai." BrainyQuote.com. Xplore Inc, 2012. 21 May. 2012.
<<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/a/anitadesai219874.html>>

⁴ Anita Desai, Indian Writer. 28/02/2012. 21/05/2012. <http://www.indianetzone.com/4/anita_desai.htm>

she adds that this Indian writer can be considered as an innovator concerning the Indian psychological novel (Coussy 250). But still, she writes in English and in D. Maya's work, we learn that Anita Desai chose this language on purpose: "It was the language that chose me," she declared (Maya 136). We can venture to say that this particular language allowed her to have some critical distance from Indian life and her role close to an ethnologist's. Elaine Yee Lin Ho notices that Desai tries to draw a portrait of different Indian spaces which can be domestic or rural. She is a subtle observer of the Indian life in small towns. She allows her reader to catch the diversity of cultures and lives in the country after its independence. Thus, we have access to the private spaces of communities, families or individual minds.

I chose this author for my work because I read one of her books when I was younger, *Fasting, Feasting*, (FF) published in 1999. This book left a very strange impression on me, a sort of uneasiness as if I was not able at the time to grasp the true meaning of the novel. So I was interested in analyzing this lady's writing. Several books were chosen for this work. *Games at Twilight* (GT) is a collection of short stories published in 1978 and it interested me because I wanted to discover what was hidden behind such a title and I did not want to limit my work to novels. *Fire on the Mountain* (FOM), published in 1977 deals with a conflict between generations: an old lady, Nanda Kaul is forced to put her great-granddaughter up for the summer. It is a common theme so I wanted to know how Anita Desai dealt with it. *The Village By The Sea* (VS), published in 1982 is actually a book for children and deals with Hari, a young boy who leaves his village to find work in Bombay. I wanted to show that even in a book for children, Desai evokes themes that are similar to her reflection for adults. According to Elaine Yee Lin Ho, these first three novels introduced Desai on the international scene. When I worked on my outline, I found that I had to add another book in my corpus to work more precisely on cultural dislocation so I added *Fasting, Feasting* and when I read it, I realized that I had no memories about the story, which is actually quite violent: it is the story of an Indian family, of the children's lives.

In these four different books, the isolation of the characters was striking. Indeed, it ties up with what Rushdie said. Desai said in an interview:

I am interested in characters who are not average but have retreated or have been driven into despair and so turned against or made to stand against the general current. It is easy to flow with the current, it makes no demands, it costs no efforts. But those

who cannot follow it, whose hearts cry out ‘the great No,’ who fight the current and struggle against it, they know what demands are and what it costs to meet them.⁵

I decided to study how the characters struggle, in different ways, with isolation and alienation in *Fire on the Mountain*, *Games at Twilight*, *The Village by the Sea* and *Fasting, Feasting*. However, this is already the main theme of another novel written by Desai, *In Custody* (published in 1984). I did not choose this book because it is one of the most famous ones she wrote. A lot of analyses of this novel have been done and since it was necessary to deal with several books, *In Custody* would have brought too much material to analyze.

Psychologist Frank Johnson defines alienation as “separation (or distance) between two or more entities. Equally basic is the connotation of anguish or tension accompanying such separation – usually the quality of estrangement and loss, but also accommodating to the connotation of relief at the interposition of distance.”⁶ D.K. Pabby uses this definition and adds that other feelings like paranoia, frustration, fear-psychosis can become consequences of such a feeling. It also creates very negative feelings about the person himself, mainly depreciation, generating loneliness and a disjunction from the self and from the environment he lives in (Pabby 25).

To understand these notions of alienation and isolation that the characters experience, it is necessary to go through three steps of analysis. First, it is obvious that we have to look at the origin of isolation and alienation. Then when the origin will be clearly defined, it will allow us to develop how these two concepts manifest themselves in the stories and in Desai’s style. Finally, we will be able to show the different solutions considered by the characters, solutions which are all linked to the individual’s awakening.

⁵ Atma Ram, ‘An interview with Anita Desai.’ In *Interviews with Indian Writers*. Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1983, pp. 21-23.

⁶ Johnson, Frank. ‘Alienation : Overview and Introduction.’ In *Alienation: Concept, Term and Meaning*, Frank Johnson, ed. New York: Seminar Press, 1973, p. 4.

I/ Social Pressure

Anita Desai is a woman interested in feelings, in what people experience within the family bubble. Her novels do not present many actions and adventures, but the author portrays Indian lives and social structures. She denounces the flaws of Indian society by painting small scenes of everyday life; she shows the reader how society works and how it can put pressure on people sometimes to the point of destroying individuals.

Indian society has always had strict rules. The pressure created by these rules is huge, and it directly acts upon the individual, sometimes leading to isolation, and even alienation. We will begin our study of Desai's fiction with an analysis of how Indian society relentlessly attempts to 'mould' individuals, shaping them in its own image. This social pressure is divided into three branches that we are going to analyze: the first one is the pressure created by the family. Then it is important to understand how it leads to failed marriages and finally how social pressure subverts homes. Women and children are the main victims because they are vulnerable figures with very small importance in the family circle. They are enclosed in a patriarchal society. So the first piece of the puzzle deals with the family as a micro society which contributes to the development of this pressure that crushes the individual. The family has a great role to play in the creation of isolation, so it becomes one of the main actors of social pressure since the family is a social organism. In certain cases, it is a huge devouring monster that keeps eating the vitality and the individuality of its members.

1) Pressure imposed by the family:

Fasting, Feasting is a very good example of a family which acts as a micro-society and breaks the spirit of its children: they are neglected and rejected by their parents, and this lack of affection in their life constructs their future existence. The book is divided into two parts: in the first part, the story is set in India and tells the story of an Indian family. The parents are very strict, their unmarried daughter Uma lives with them and they use her as a maid-servant, whereas the other daughter Aruna is married to a very rich man from Bombay. It is the description of their lives, especially of Uma's. The second part is set in the United-States and deals with their son Arun, who spends the summer in a strange American family. Now if we pay attention to Uma's case, it is representative of family pressure: she does the housework in her parent's house because the three attempts to marry her failed, and she never

gets any attention from any member of her family or from society, that is to say her parent's friends. (Ho 84). The failure of the parents is obvious; no kindness at all can be found in them. MamaPapa are not named individually so they have no parental and no human qualities (Ho 84). The way they treat Uma is drastic, they do not want her to enjoy herself, or even live her own life. In the following example, a nun (Uma's former teacher) has called her to invite her to a party:

'Who was that?' they ask, although they have already guessed.

'Mrs O'Henry—she has invited me to a coffee party'. Uma can hardly speak; she would like to keep this treasure invitation to herself—it is for herself alone, after all—and would have preferred not to divulge it. Of course, that is out of question.

'Why?' asks Papa.

'Coffee? Why coffee?' asks Mama.

Uma jerks her head back. 'Why?' she snaps back at them. 'She is giving a party—a coffee party, not a tea party—and she has invited some ladies, and me.' (Desai, FF 112)

Uma's life is totally controlled by her parents, she cannot have privacy or intimacy, her family has to rule and know everything. It deprives her from constructing her own identity.⁷ In this quoted passage, Mama, echoing Papa's words, shows how much she is locked in the bounds of marriage and patriarchal society. MamaPapa are fused in one person and the fact that they share the same name proves it. So the metaphor of cannibalism is used, they have 'eaten' one another and they feel voraciousness about themselves and their children: they want to 'eat', to annihilate their children as they did for themselves. This leads to the idea of the destruction of the children, which deeply symbolizes the pressure of the family.

Now let us take the case of Arun, the younger child. People who are victims of the absence of human values suffer fasting or feasting (Sinha 90): for example Uma suffers from fasting, emotionally, being deprived of any rights since she is not good enough at school or to find a husband. Her mother is hungry to be important in society so she fasts too. The two characters fast because something is wrong in their lives. On the contrary, Arun has to enjoy the best privileges and to feast since a son is an honor in an Indian family, but it does not work this way, as we can see in the following lines:

If one word could sum up Arun's childhood (...) that word was 'education'."

"All the years of scholarly toil had worn down any distinguishing features Arun's face might have had.(...) There was nothing else—not the hint of a smile, frown, laugh or

⁷ The following statements are based on Elaine Yee Lin Ho's analysis of *Fasting, Feasting*, pp. 86-88.

anything: these had all been ground down till they had disappeared. (Desai FF 118-121)

But he is a vegetarian because meat makes him feel sick so he actually follows a poor diet, and his personality crushed by his parents makes him fast. He still feels oppressed by them in the United-States because they have decided for him where he would go during the summer. Even miles away, he cannot control his own life. Similarly, Melanie, the daughter of the American family with which Arun stays for the summer, feasts with sweets and candies but fasts emotionally for parental love. The two actions are always merged in a complicated way. This novel is a great indictment of:

- _ The parents who have a burning desire to have a SON even though their daughters are in their teens,
- _ The parents who cut short the promising career of their talented daughters for the sake of their marriage,
- _ The parents who are least responsive to the private sorrows of their daughters. (Sarma, 70).

The parents in Desai's books are not really prepared to be good parents.

We can also see this in *The Village By The Sea*, where the children of the novel are left alone. The father is alcoholic so he cannot work anymore; he is only able to drink. The family is not fed and has no protection. The ill mother is also absent from the life of her children, she cannot give any advice to help them deal with the situation. Hari and Lila are forced into adulthood because of irresponsible parents. They have to play a role which is not theirs: Hari goes to Bombay to work and sends money home while Lila has to take care of the house, her mother and her two little sisters. The two children leave childhood too early, and they are forced into a new identity of substitutive parents, which they did not choose.

In a similar way in *Fire on the Mountain*, no adult can play the role of a parent. The book tells the story of a young child, Raka, who is sent to her great-grandmother's home in the mountains to recover from illness and escape a stifling family atmosphere. Nanda Kaul, the old lady, is very upset with this arrival because she wants to live alone now that she had done her duty by her family. Raka is a broken child marked by the violence of her father against her mother. She is not affected by social conventions so she is not as docile as girls should be, according to Indian tradition. She has been rejected so she develops hostility towards others, because she feels frustrated. Since the world defines her as an outcast, she rejects the world. (Tiwari 171-172). Raka attempts to escape family control with her

unsociable behavior. Seema Malik speaks of the destroying effects of an oppressive atmosphere at home on a young child's mind. She quotes Anita Desai: "I agree that the experiences of childhood are the most vivid and lasting ones." (Malik 180). For example at one moment, Raka watches a party at the club and her reaction is revealing: in this world to which she does not belong, she experiences trauma, seeing everybody as monsters. This party reminds her of another traumatic past and how she felt "the stream of urine warm and weakening between her legs like a stream of blood, and her mother lay down on the floor and shut her eyes and wept." (Desai FOM 71).

Raka does not find affection close to her great grand-mother, because the lady has become hermetic to any human contact, as she is herself a victim of family pressure. The pressure of the family acted upon her since she had to be a mother whereas this role did not fit her: "She had been so glad when it was over. She had been glad to leave it all behind, in the plains, like a great, heavy, difficult book that she had read through and was not required to read again." (Desai FOM 30). Nanda (Raka's great-grandmother) saw the activity of taking care of children as a load (Ho 25). She repeats a pattern she experienced when she was a child. Her harshness with her children is linked to her own disturbed childhood, to her adventurous father who was often absent: "her heart [...] has been craving for love ever since her childhood." (Malik 184).

If we look at the short story 'Studies in the Park' in *Games at Twilight*, we can see how the student Suno is also deprived of love. He has to work and study to have a good job and honor his family. His father keeps talking to him about that, hammering it into his brain: "'Remember, Suno, I expect good results from you. Study hard, Suno.' Just behind him, I saw all the rest of them standing, peering in, silently. All of them stared at me, at the exam I was to take. At the degree I was to get. Or not get. Horrifying thought. Oh study, study, study, they all breathed at me..." (Desai GT 22). The members of the family are quite numerous and it is also conveyed by the repetition of the verb 'study' in the imperative form. This word is their very breath whereas it creates an atmosphere of suffocation, combined with the accumulations making the rhythm faster. They touch the extreme limits of the imposition of an identity on a student, and Desai shows what a load it is. What makes Suno fight and rebel is the vision of a couple in the park which transforms his perception of life, because he witnesses a great tenderness he was not familiar with (Ho 9-10).

We have just seen that the social pressure embodied by the family crushes and takes control over the individual. But within a family, some ties are more important than others. Indeed, marriage is a powerful institution and highly linked to social conventions, especially in India.

2) Failure of marriage:

Marriage is one of the main social conventions in India, but hypocrisy is the key word which rules in Desai's novels. Marriages are rooted in the Indian tradition: they are arranged by the family, and the people concerned have no choice. Social pressure and social rules lead to the failure of marriages but since divorce is not allowed, people still have to live with each other. As a consequence, the characters experience alienation, and the terrible pressure (analyzed above) children are subjected to, generally has its roots in failed marriages.

For example, in *The Village By The Sea*, Hari's parents are not close to each other at first, they are both locked in their own problems. But it is the only novel in which there is an improvement, probably because it is a novel for children. At the end, the father stops drinking when his wife is sent to the hospital, and he waits in front of the building: he wants to see her and take care of her. The separation, the fact that she left home, triggered off a new behavior in him, as if he had an epiphany and understood that he could lose his family. But among the other couples, men and women are bound to partnerships that do not work.

Let us take the case of women: they cannot find fulfillment in marriage. The modern woman lives in a society dominated by men and marriage frequently brings destruction of the wife's individual personality. There can be an incompatibility of personalities, and according to Bhatnagar, marriage may annihilate everything the wife had once loved (Bhatnagar MWR 48). In Desai's world, the vision of 'marriage-as-prison' is not restricted to India. Indeed modern western couples are also affected by marriage failure. In 'Scholar and Gypsy' (*Games at Twilight*), Desai deals with an American couple, which spends some time in India. Their different experiences in the country reveal the failure of their marriage. The woman, Pat, has a behavior close to a child's, her words are borrowed from her husband's language, from the scholar figure (Ho 69). Pat is under the influence of her husband, David, and even if the trip to India definitely parts them, their relation before the trip was not based on equality, Pat was crushed under David's identity. He does not understand why his wife cannot see India the way he does. What we know of her interior world is opposed to David's perception of her.

Thanks to this opposition, the multiple dimension of the character of Pat is revealed. Pat implicitly questions her husband's authority so a fight begins between his intellectual comprehension of India and hers. His failure can also be seen in his denial of Pat's new excitement for the hippy community: he is shocked when he realizes that his wife is becoming closer to this community and more autonomous (Ho 70-71).

In *Fasting, Feasting*, western marriages are also questioned. The Patton family embodies the American family and way of life, but husband and wife do not seem to be happy together: Mrs. Patton hides her problems by acting as a compulsive shopper and when Mr. Patton speaks to her, it is only to reproach her because the children do not come to eat the meat he has prepared. At the beginning of part two, the text says: "An irate voice calls from the patio: 'Isn't anyone interested in the bar-be-cue?'" (Desai FF 163) and at the end he has not changed: "Once Arun heard Mr. Patton growl, 'here's another batch of catalogues come for you. What in God's name is numerology? Or gemology? Karmic lessons! What's that? Hell, what's this you're getting into?'" (Desai FF 227). In America marriage is supposed to be a choice, it is not arranged by families, but here Desai shows that they can fail as well, it is not an Indian specificity. And this broken marriage also results in troubled children: Melanie, the American daughter, embodies their failure: she symbolizes a loveless union full of anger.

On the Indian side, the problems of marriage are also present but in a tragic form. Anamika, Uma's cousin, is the perfect daughter: beautiful, sweet and patient, she was accepted at Oxford University but was not allowed to go, marriage being her destiny. She is silent in the novel, only perceived by others (Ho 87). She has no voice because she is completely devoured by her family and then by the bonds of marriage. Her own personality cannot emerge. The fact that she did not go to Oxford (because female education is not in the tradition) is a symbol of her absence as an individual (Ho 88). She is sacrificed on the marriage altar. Her mother-in-law beats her without any intervention on her husband's part. She could not go to Aruna's (Uma's younger sister, so Anamika's cousin) wedding because her in-laws were supposed to be so fond of her that they could not be separated from her. It was an excuse, but the family knew she was ill-treated and no one said anything. She was finally burnt alive and her in-laws covered this up as a suicide:

What some of the neighbours said was that [the mother-in-law] herself, possibly in collusion with her son, had dragged Anamika out on the veranda at that hour when it was still dark – possibly before four o'clock – and that they had tied her up in a nylon sari, poured some kerosene over her and set her on fire.

What the husband said was that he had been away on a business trip and returned only that afternoon on hearing the news.

What the mother-in-law said was that she always had Anamika sleep beside her, as if she were a daughter, her own child. Only that night Anamika has insisted on sleeping in her own room. She must have planned it, plotted it all.

What Anamika's family said was that it was fate, God had willed it and it was Anamika's destiny.

What Uma said was nothing. (Desai FF 151)

In this quote, we can see the progression from external considerations to a personal one. There is a progression in length; it becomes shorter and the expression of pain is sadder. The anaphoric repetition "what...said" increases the dramatic tension, the sentences are faster and the last one is highly dramatic. Uma, in her silence, expresses the deepest pain and her simplicity is opposed to the reactions of society. Social pressure prevents the family from saving Anamika (removed from her husband's house, she would have been dishonored) and the failure of her marriage alienates her and finally consumes her.

In a way, Mama is burnt alive like Anamika: MamaPapa are enclosed in a cannibalistic relationship, being only one person and that person is Papa – thus the marriage destroys Mama's identity. Their reactions are perfectly matched. For Jyoti Nandan, "Married women erase their own identity" and Mama has integrated patriarchy to the point that she is transformed into a tormenter for the other women of her own family (Nandan 185). In her case, marriage failed to respect the wife. She acts according to her husband and in harmony with him especially to punish, for example when Dr Dutt suggests that Uma could come and work with her: "It was Mama who spoke, however. As usual, for Papa. Very clearly and decisively. 'Our daughter does not need to go out to work, Dr Dutt,' (...) 'There is no need,' Papa supported Mama's view. In double strength, it grew formidable." (Desai FF 143).

But Mama accepts her fate with no pain, whereas it is not the case of Nanda Kaul (*Fire on the Mountain*). She has been broken by her husband's affair with a teacher, Miss David, an affair which lasted all his life, sending Nanda back to her own existential void and lack of love. This fed her bitterness.

[Her husband] had been to drop some of the guests home – no, she corrected herself with asperity, *one* of the guests home. She watched him go up the veranda steps, puffing at his cigar, and smelt the rich tobacco. She had stood very still in the shadow, flung by the loquat tree in the corner of the lawn. She had not moved, not made a sound. She had watched him cross the veranda, go into the drawing-room, and waited till the light there went out and another came on in the bedroom that had been only a small

dressing-room till she had had his bed put there. Then she paced the lawn again, slower and slower. (Desai FOTM 26).

In this quote, the isolation of Nanda is obvious, she only sees her husband walking away from her, she is distant from him as well as love is distant from marriage. Nanda is a spectator of this failure but she ignores everything for the sake of pride. This pride creates a resentfulness which affects her children, who, later, cannot perceive her as a good and loving mother. Her nature is undecipherable to them. Her great-grandchild, Raka, embodies her parents' failed marriage, by being wild, silent, enclosed in her own world and pain. What we commonly call a home, that is to say a building, has very different meanings for Raka since she feels at home in the wilderness, in the open space of nature. The building does not have the function of a home to her.

3) Subverted homes:

If Raka makes the wilderness her home, it reveals that social pressure and failed marriage have a deep influence on the very concept of home. It is supposed to be a natural shelter for women. Female characters in Desai's novels have their social identity linked to home and hearth, but the very notion of 'shelter' is negated – as 'home' becomes a trap for both women and children in Desai's fiction. *Fire on the Mountain* can be defined as belonging to a phase of writing which explores the painful existential problems of Indian women, trapped by society (Coussy 250). Women are psychologically and socially dislocated because of the Indian home, and it leads to a fight to be freed (Ho 20). India is a challenge for women because stereotypes about them are present in legends, myths and religion, they are part of the culture (for example, the law of Manu: "Her father protects her in childhood, her husband protects her in youth and her sons protect her in old age; a woman is never fit for independence"⁸). So the female characters at home are 'imprisoned' and, for example, for Nanda Kaul, tradition was a real burden to her but she accepted confinement and domesticity because she could not choose at that moment to be an outcast. She fought to change this prison into a private space, but she achieved it only through loneliness. Domestic life is composed of repressed chaos and frustration overhung by a furious uproar of activities (Ho 21

⁸ Quoted by Nandan, Jyoti. 'A Challenge to 'Third World' Women's Status as Other in *Fasting, Feasting*.' In *The Fiction of Anita Desai*, Vol II, Suman Bala and D.K. Pabby, eds. New Delhi: Khosla Publishing House, 2002, p.184.

and 23). Home is often a prison where the characters cannot develop their identity (which is already fragile), where they are crushed every day and where they lose their individuality little by little. “Being ‘at home’ means searching for an adult accommodation to the ineluctable condition of imprisonment.”(Ho 85-86).

In *Fire on the Mountain* Nanda reveals her need for a masculine figure, telling Raka stories of her childhood: as a woman, she has always been dependent on men, they are linked to security or attachment and without them the self is dislocated (Raizada 178). Nanda tries to link home and security with the memory of her father. The stories she tells are about him, bringing home animals from foreign countries: “‘He would feed them himself. They loved fish. We used to catch fish in the stream for them, but we never dared feed them ourselves – they had such sudden, vicious claws.’ But Raka seemed not to enjoy the picture of the caged animals devouring the fish.” (Desai FOM 96). Raka seems freer, she is not interested and she is opposed to the two other female characters being wilder and being a child. She can be compared to an Indian version of “l’enfant sauvage” because physical discomfort or pain do not seem to affect her (Ho 26). Home is a prison to her and she feels at home in nature, so home is not a place of protection and love and security; all these roles are subverted. Home is a recurrent pattern, strengthened by the titles of the parts: “part I: Nanda Kaul at Carignano; part II: Raka comes to Carignano; part III: Ila Das leaves Carignano”. Each character of the trio is evoked, linked to the place Carignano, so to Nanda’s home. There is a progression from a static state to movement. Each of the characters hopes in a way to find a home in this place but fails. The three women are dislocated from their true home, even Ila (Nanda’s friend) who has to work hard to survive and lives in great poverty. The place of women is at home but home is not where they are happy and well-adjusted. Women in Desai’s work are “confined within the cyclic parameters of home-womb-tomb.”(Walters Kishore 187).

This is also the case for Uma in *Fasting, Feasting*. She is imprisoned in her parents’ house because she did not get a husband. Home is not a place of freedom and family love to her but truly a prison where she cannot have any privacy, where every movement she makes and every word she says is watched. She is “wed yet unwed. At home yet homeless. [...] a family prisoner for life with a coil of unshed tears around her neck.”(Sarma 71). Madhoo Kamra and Nitu Ahluwalia say that in the novel, characters are victims of their feelings. Since Uma is an introvert, “she accepts her failure readily.” “There is a gradual fall in her self-rating, both about herself and others around.” (Ahluwalia and Kamra 75). The fact that she is

unhappy is developed in parallel to her degrading self-esteem. Uma finds shelter in a total devotion to her duties and work (Ahluwalia and Kamra 77). Home has crushed Uma's identity so much that she finds self-accomplishment only in her duties; her true home is a spiritual one. "She wants to escape into her own spiritual or mental world of abandonment." (Sinha 84). She finds relief when she is alone in the house, when she can contemplate her collection of bangles and Christmas cards. She tries with these moments to grasp the meaning of her world and her existence. She is herself. When she leaves her house to live with her aunt Mira-Masi in a temple, she feels at home, in her element, because Uma is a sensitive and spiritual person and this place corresponds to her spirit. In this place, she experiences her first epileptic crisis: finally freed from her home-prison, her body freely reacts to all the pressure she has experienced; it releases all the tension, it is not enclosed anymore and expresses its violent reaction to such a family, in a safe place and a homely one.

It is interesting to compare this situation with Arun's. He is away from his Indian home but finds other failures in the American home. Home does not play its role of haven. As an alien, Arun is protected against the power of excessive consumption generated by an American home (Ho 92). He is the link between two homes which resemble each other. And it is once he is abroad that he truly becomes conscious of his sister's plight, by comparison with Melanie: "Then Arun does see a resemblance to something he knows; a resemblance to the contorted face of an enraged sister who, failing to express her outrage against misunderstanding, against inattention to her unique and singular being and its hungers, merely spits and froths in ineffectual protest." (Desai FF 214). With the word "ineffectual" it is clear that home is a prison for the two girls, deaf to their needs and desires. Melanie is finally rescued from home and sent to a center to cure her anorexia whereas Uma is not saved and the first part of the book closes on her, when she is at Anamika's funeral. It leaves the impression of a character forever locked in sadness and mourning, mourning for her cousin and for the expectations she had but that stay imprisoned in home. Anamika too had been locked up in her in-laws' home, a subverted place where she finally died instead of becoming a fulfilled housewife. Similarly, in 'Studies in the Park' (*Games at Twilight*) the student Suno is forced to leave home because he cannot concentrate on his studies there. But it is also a sign that he does not belong home, it is not a place fitted to him and to his mind. He finally finds his identity in the park, outside the confined environment of home.

Like Raka and Uma, the children in *The Village By The Sea* do not find comfort and love in their home: “He must have a job if he was to find his sisters a way out of this dark, gloomy house and the illness and drunkenness and hopelessness that surrounded them like the shadows of the night.”(Desai VS 67). Their home is subverted because turned into the source of their fear and their problems. It is one of the elements that forces them into adulthood.

Let us now take one last example, the housewife in ‘The Farewell Party’. The character of Bina is bound to home but has no choice: she has to take care of an ill child and this action fills home with tensions so her situation is particular. Home is a place she is devoted to, excluded from society, but in a way she imprisons herself in it. She is nearly a social outcast but especially “a woman who does not belong and cares little about belonging,” (Ho 13). For Bina, there is a discrepancy between her personality and the social mask that is not made for her but that she has to wear for the party. Bina represses herself and her thoughts to fit into society. But the weakness, the existential void of middle-class society is hidden behind wealth, materialism and numerous activities. Homes are richly decorated and embody this wealth devoid of real meaning, so it is a hypocritical place: wealth is shown to hide the lack of meaning of their existence. The family world was the only choice Bina had. Towards the end of the party she goes into the dark garden to join some doctors and their wives, which is symbolical: it is a place where she can hide and stop repressing herself and she finds her true community where business (which is discussed inside her home by the other guests) is replaced by care (Ho 13-15).

So social pressure, created by the family, marriage, and the representation of home, attempts to annihilate the family members, especially children and women. We have seen that these points are deeply rooted in Indian tradition but that western countries are concerned too. The three dimensions are linked: for example, Hari and Lila are oppressed by the family forcing them to become adults, but this oppression is the result of a failed marriage with no communication between the parents and in consequence, home does not feel like home. All these elements can be perceived as causes of alienation and isolation but now, it is essential to analyze how this alienation manifests in the narration.

II/ Manifestations of alienation and isolation.

The characters in Desai's novels, are crushed by social pressure and cannot be free. This pressure creates isolated people, who are dislocated from their environment and from what would have been their own reality, that is to say their vision of life and of the world. Society alienates them and this deep feeling of isolation appears in different ways in the novels. The characters are not able to express themselves: this problem of communication can create alienation or be a consequence of it. But isolation also appears in the way Desai treats space, linked to cultural dislocation, and time.

1) Problem of communication:

The characters have difficulty expressing themselves, expressing their feelings and establishing connections with others. To speak means to give an opinion, to express feelings and to exchange views. It is a way to exist and the absence of communication shows how much the characters are alienated.

In *The Village By The Sea* the absence of communication is striking. Hari and Lila are very different and while Lila needs to express herself, her brother is mute: "He did not feel like talking. He never did talk much and always preferred to think things out very slowly and carefully before he did." (Desai VS 15). A gap is created between the two children and the fact that they do not have the same needs concerning expression increases their isolation. The problem of communication is here a consequence of a broken family. At the beginning of the novel, one night, the father comes back home completely drunk, whereas everybody is already in bed, and all the family waits for the scene to end: "There was a silence then. But the silence was not calm and lovely, it was full of fear and anger and nightmares." (Desai VS 34). The accumulation at the end of this sentence, reinforced by a ternary rhythm, evokes a crescendo and stronger feelings, all created by this silence. Silence gives birth to these feelings and so emphasizes the lack of communication.

Now if we take the case of *Fasting, Feasting*, the absence of communication is obvious too but is presented differently. The daughter Aruna (Uma's sister) embodies consumption after her marriage with a very wealthy man. It becomes her only way of expression: she only speaks about what she has and what the others do not have (Ho 89). Consumption and materialism are her only references, her only words. She cannot

communicate beyond this concept of frenetic possession. The American characters (the Patton family) are also described thanks to their materialism, especially with their relation to food: consumption, regurgitation and digestion (Ho 91). Like Aruna, consumption is their only way of expression. They consume, digest and regurgitate feelings but are unable to put words on them: for example Melanie consumes, digests and regurgitates her candies because she is unable to express herself differently. We witness a materialistic feast whereas the American family has deficiencies in emotions like love and affection.

If Aruna expresses herself thanks to materialism, she is able to tell what suits her or not and that she is unsatisfied.⁹ On the other hand, Uma keeps everything inside whereas she feels a greater diversity of emotions than Arun or Aruna. Uma is a foreigner to pleasure, which shows the bitter unhappiness that accompanies her in the external world. She chooses to be silent because her “personal dimension and social dimension of self-esteem represses her confidence and gradually negative evaluation and social rejection sets in, making her highly sensitive to her subjective discomfort.” (Kumar Pandeya 109). She sometimes perceives herself the way the others do: her social environment moulds her perception of herself and thus makes her practice self-censorship. It is also valid for Melanie who cannot communicate to express her bitterness: she is a mirror to Uma and she agonizes with loneliness and the feeling that she is unwanted so she encloses herself in silence to express her discomfort. Uma “is treated as non-entity”. (ibid) She cannot work with Dr Dutt because her parents refuse the job for her; she is not allowed to express herself (ibid.). Beyond non expression, the result is non-existence. She does not communicate with her family, but she is very sensitive and communicates her pain through her behavior: when Uma is told that she is not allowed to go to school anymore because her results are terrible and because she has to take care of her brother, her shaking hands show her despair. “[Mama] reached out her hand to catch Uma’s. ‘I need your help, beti,’ she coaxed, her voice sweet with pleading. Uma wrenched her hand free.” (Desai FF 22).

Anamika, her cousin, is the most terrible example of this lack of love and absence of communication. She does not speak at all in the novel so she is not considered as an individual. All the clues of her horrible situation were not discussed or taken into account. The absence of communication leads her to death.

⁹ The following statements are based on Madhoo Kamra’s and Nitu Ahluwalia’s work, pp. 76-78.

If we look at *Fire on the Mountain*, we can see how this lack of communication is strong. The book itself is written like a monologue. There are very few dialogues, silence is predominant. It also reveals that social relations are rejected (Ho 22): indeed, speaking is an essential social act. Society is in this way close to theater: you need to speak and to have a voice to exist. Here Nanda cannot communicate because what she feels – isolation and rejection of domestic life – is unique and un-understandable in her society: she represses her feelings. She wants a complete isolation in the wilderness because it is her way to deal with the experiences of her former life that she cannot express, her way to try and forget them. From the outside, Nanda seems to have a great composure but her lack of communication shows a sense of the self which is unstable (Ho 23). Raka does not communicate but it is her nature to be wild and silent. Nevertheless, the only form of communication she has seen in her family was violence. So to her, words are powerless and useless. She finds her strength in silence, it is how she rebels: “Raka wanted only one thing – to be left alone and pursue her own secret life amongst the rocks and pines of Kasauli.” (Desai FOM 48). Her emotions and her activities are not to be shared so not to be communicated either.

In *Games at Twilight*, we find other silent characters. For example in ‘Surface Texture’ Harish experiences an epiphany and becomes obsessed by the surface of objects. It brings a radical change in his life: he cannot concentrate anymore at work and is fired. He puts his family in great financial difficulty. He devotes his days to the “surface texture”. His wife does not understand such behavior and Harish does not explain how he feels and how his life and his perception of life have changed. He is silent in the novel and unable to share what he experiences: “‘What is my shame to you? I will have to hang my head and crawl home and beg my father to look after us since you won’t’ and that was what she did. He was sorry to see her pack the little silver *kum-kum* box in her black trunk.”(Desai GT 38). Harish does not react and does not speak confronted with his wife’s despair. His isolation caused by his revelation suppressed his ability to communicate but it is only because he does not need to anymore. He has reached another world with different realities, the realities of objects, and he has given up modern conveniences. His silence symbolizes his strength and his new identity: people perceive him as a swami¹⁰ now: “‘Swami-ji,’ they whispered, ‘speak’. Harish did not speak and his silence made him still holier.”(Desai GT 40) The fact that he does not express

¹⁰ A mystic in India.

himself is a result of his isolation from the modern world, but in this case it is not a mutilation but a conquest. Harish has nothing to say to the world anymore.

Struggles to communicate have two sides: on the one hand, it is a handicap which prevents the characters from expressing themselves and which shows their alienation, cut off from society. On the other hand, the lack of communication can become a choice and thus strength. But if isolation is linked to the absence of expression, it is also deeply influenced by space and how the characters experience their environment.

2) Space:

Desai creates a cultural map of the Indian milieu and shows to her reader little scenes of the great diversity of life and cultures (Ho 5). In a way, space determines the characters and contributes to isolation. Space creates dislocation, physical or cultural, but also has an analogical function.

The Village By the Sea is a good example of dislocation caused by the environment. Hari is exposed to the city and he becomes the consciousness of a village which has to awake and change. But the city creates claustrophobia compared to the blessed tranquility of Thul, the village Hari comes from, and to the open space of the sea (Maya 147 and 158). In the city, Hari is an alien. He has to adapt to a new environment to create his new identity and become an adult, so this novel has the characteristics of a Bildungsroman. The discrepancy between the city and the country-side emphasizes Hari's isolation. For example when he arrives in Bombay with other villagers, he witnesses a manifestation and a sort of meeting, concerning the destruction of his village; the state plans to destroy several villages of the coast to build factories instead: "Hari could not understand what he was talking about – it was all new and strange. How did these strangers, these city people, know more about Thul and the other fishing villages of the coast than he himself did? He felt more ignorant than he had ever felt in his life." (Desai VS 123). The two places – city and country-side – convey two different ways of life; Hari comes from an area of manual work whereas the city is associated with intellectual work and political activity. Hari feels the gap but he is finally able to adapt: he learns how to mend watches so he will be able to open a store in his village, to provide a service for the future workers of the factories.

In a different way, the characters adapt to their environment too in *Fire on the Mountain*. The image of the pine tree is recurrent: it appears six times in the novel to stress

the desire Nanda Kaul has to fuse with nature. “Carignano embodies the process of ageing, barrenness, loneliness, decay and death”. (Kamara 107-108). Space has an analogical function. The landscape is bare, desolated and reflects the interior of the characters, especially Nanda’s loneliness and bitterness. Raka is part of Carignano, a place “full of wild beauty”. She is familiar with the forest and “She knows many secret shortcuts within the jungle. She wants to inhale the grace of the jungle all alone.” (Tiwari 170). This pleasure cannot be shared. It seems that Raka, in her relationship to nature, is close to a worshipper linked to “her most private idol.” (ibid). For Raka, human beings are less real than the forest itself (ibid). In Carignano, Raka is not alienated, she truly belongs to this place, but the wild nature isolates her from her great grandmother: she cannot follow Raka when she leaves the house to explore the mountain because the walk is too difficult for her. Nanda is excluded from Raka’s world because of this space, which is also supposed to fit her. On Nanda’s side, the waste in the landscape mirrors the waste of her life (Raizada 174). Her garden had been transformed and improved for a long time by all the previous inhabitants of the house, but she added nothing, she ‘created’ a garden in her image: she lets it live and die freely. The wilderness in which she retired cut her off from her former life: her physical isolation also represents her will to isolate herself from her past.

Now if we look at *Fasting, Feasting*, the cultural dislocation is obvious. We are confronted with the values of two different countries: India is described as a place of shortage whereas the United-States as a place of abundance. Both societies beget frustration: in India, it is due to the patriarchal society based on gender discrimination; in the USA, it is provoked by the rapidity of the way of life, and the absence of commitment between persons. The American family is not connected because there is no feeling of belonging between people (Sinha 83 and 87). Two different environments, both with flaws, create alienation within the family bubble. The different behaviors of the characters highlight the contrast that exists between the cultures and the two countries: “Just as Arun is a compulsive vegetarian, so are the Americans compulsive non-vegetarians, and equally compulsive shoppers.” (Wlaters Kishore 141-142). Arun experiences cultural dislocation in the USA. He was traumatized by his Indian life and at first finds relief in a foreign country:

It was the first time in his life away from home, away from MamaPapa, his sisters, the neighbourhood of old bungalows, dust gardens and straggling hedges where he had grown up, the only town he had ever known; he had at last experienced the total freedom of anonymity, the total absence of relations, of demands, needs, requests, ties,

responsibilities, commitments. He was Arun. He had no past, no family and no country (Desai FF 172).

His identity is disconnected from his origins, a new space is a first step towards a new freedom. But the immersion in another family alienates him again. When he announces that he is a vegetarian, Mrs Patton wants to follow his diet and invites him to shop with her, to cook what he likes: “She watched, with pride and complicity. Arun ate with an expression of woe and a sense of mistreatment. How was he to tell Mrs Patton that these were not the foods that figured in his culture? That his digestive system did not know how to turn them into nourishment?” (Desai FF 184-185). The discrepancy between the two cultures is highlighted thanks to food: different spaces provide different foods. And it is also conveyed by the very contrasting feelings of the two characters: Mrs Patton feels “pride and complicity” whereas Arun has “a sense of mistreatment”. The cultural gap disconnects them. Space raises the question of belonging or being a stranger.

This aspect is particularly striking in the short story ‘Scholar and Gypsy’ (*Games at Twilight*).¹¹ David is an intellectual and his identity is defined by his vision of India: an object of study. He is unable to understand that Pat, his wife, is overwhelmed by this country. Her unease is manifested by all her physical reactions which symbolize “a progressive inner disintegration” (Ho 67). Her experience is linked to touch. Pat feels deeply alienated in the culture and the environment of Bombay, so she fights to survive in such a place. “They were all crying, shoving, crowding. She pushed at them with her hands in panic.” (Desai GT 111) The three verbs in the progressive form give an impression of movement and action, and combined with the ternary rhythm, the sentence conveys the oppression that Pat feels. A foreigner can be a source of anxiety for local people but to Pat, who is a foreigner, the country itself exercises violence and threatens her. Too much color and glitter attack her “like a kind of alien possession sapping her of vigor and life” (Ho 68). She always uses the word “primitive” to describe the people and the environment, to qualify what is to her a dangerous milieu. The representation of the people is constructed through bestial evocations. Bombay is described as a jungle, then Delhi as a desert, unwelcoming places which are a menace to her life. We can perceive Pat as a “colonialist” but we have to take into account Desai’s precise vision of the cultural and ethnic upheaval that Pat experiences as a woman from the west confronted to India for the first time. Her reaction, close to prejudice, actually reveals her lack

¹¹ The following remarks are based on Elaine Yee Lin Ho’s work, pp. 67-71.

of understanding and her cognitive effort to reconstruct alterity in an understandable way. Her discovery of India makes her travel in a childish world composed of fantastical transformations, sensations but closer to a nightmare than to a fairy-tale. David's past as well as Pat's past, condition their perception of the country. Desai presents India as a transitory place where they express "their foreign past". Their arrival to the countryside shows the reader a very different place but still Indian. The mountains allow Pat to find a spiritual calmness. She is able to map out India thanks to her own childhood memories. Now, she feels more familiar with the place. Opposed to this reaction, David becomes more and more distressed and expresses the alienation he feels in this new mountainous environment. The traditional life disturbs him whereas he is supposed to have ethnographic preoccupations. He is not interested any more in his subject of work. Space here also isolates David and Pat from each other, their different experiences of the country, of a different space, parts them.

We have seen that alienation is linked to space which can represent what the characters truly are: Raka is as rough as the bare landscape, American people consume massively and their country represents plenty. On the contrary, space can also deconstruct identity: Arun feels no longer "Indian" in the USA, and Pat is deeply perturbed by India but in her case, the experience of space is influenced by her past, so time has a role to play in alienation.

3) Time:

To link space and time, we can say that Pat's perception of India and of the places where she feels at ease is linked to her childhood and her identity as a girl from Vermont: she finds relief in the mountains, in the hippy community because these elements are close to something she has experienced as a child; they are reminiscent of her memories. Thanks to these memories, thanks to the effect of time, Pat can recreate herself and understand her environment.

Time is often linked to identity and so to alienation in Desai's novels. In the short story 'Games at Twilight', the influence of time is striking: the child Ravi hides in a sort of junk room, because he plays hide-and-seek with other children, but he stays hidden a very long time. Then the other children forget him and start to play another game. Ravi experiences something traumatic because time has annihilated him as an individual; the passage of time has excluded him from the community of children. The description of the

atmosphere follows this idea of a changing, acting time. It becomes twilight, which symbolizes a period of transition. The passage of time shocks the child but also raises his consciousness: he has been forgotten. "All this time no one had remembered Ravi. Having disappeared from the scene, he had disappeared from their mind. Clean." (Desai GT 9) The last word comes as a bolt from the blue and acts as a blade, simple and strong like an erased memory for the children or awareness for Ravi.

But it is not the only way Desai deals with time: it can also be deconstructed. For example in *Fasting, Feasting*, it is sometimes difficult to separate the time of the narration and the flashbacks, because they are numerous and do not refer to the same period. At the beginning of the novel, we are in the present: Uma is urged to send a parcel to Arun and to prepare tea. Then in chapter 2 we are at first in the present, then in the past with Arun's birth and all the changes the event brought about. Chapter 3 begins in the present as well and continues in the past with Uma's despair when she did not want to drop out of school to look after her brother. Part I and part II are supposed to happen at the same time, part I in India, the second one in America. But in part I we have flashbacks which are very old, which deal with the characters' childhood, whereas in part II the flashbacks are only about Arun's American summer, so they concern a very short period of time. For example, the present time in America is the summer Arun spends in the family, and in chapter 16 we have a flashback concerning his school year in college with other young Indian students. A difference based on time is created between the two parts (very old memories and recent memories) which is very revealing about the characters. Uma's oppression is deeply rooted inside her so Desai keeps referring to her past to build Uma's identity. But in part II, the writing is focused Arun's American experience as if nothing had existed before and indeed "He had no past, no family and no country." (Desai FF171). Time does not concretely help Uma (we are using the word 'concretely' here because we will see later that Uma develops a form of rebellion), she grows older and realizes that she will not be able to leave the family house whereas time acts in a concrete favorable way for Arun and Melanie. Arun is at first afraid of a past he wants to bury but also of a present he does not seem ready to live (Lal Khatri 118). But the second part of the novel deals precisely with his progress towards a present he wants to live: at the end of the novel, a parcel arrives for Arun in the Patton's house, from India. This parcel is sent at the beginning of the novel by Uma. With this parcel the story comes full circle and creates a mirror effect, as if to oppose Uma's and Arun's destinies. In the parcel, Arun finds some tea

and a shawl but the presents arrive far too late for him to appreciate them, he is spatially but also temporally disconnected from his family: it is the end of the summer and he is going to start a new chapter of his life.

If we consider *Fire on the Mountain*, time has a great influence on the characters too. In part I Nanda Kaul would like “to drift along the flow of time” (Kamara 92) but pieces of her past still affect her mind. She can see the plains which remind her of her identity as a wife. Desai uses flashbacks like in *Fasting, Feasting* to show that the passing time and memories play a great role: memories cease the smooth internal tempo of life. Time does not go forward in this novel. “Nanda Kaul unconsciously seeks to freeze time into a motionless constancy, but Time keeps moving through her past which she recapitulates as she reacts to her present surroundings.”¹² (Kamara 92). The alienation of the characters is evoked through a few summer days but these days are representative of their whole life. Nanda Kaul cannot deal with the passing of time because she wants a static life: “Till [the first cool stir of breeze] came, she would lie still, still – she would be a charred tree trunk in the forest, a broken pillar of marble in the desert, a lizard on a stone wall. A tree trunk could not harbor irritation, nor a pillar annoyance. She would imitate death, like a lizard.” (Desai FOM 23). But Ila Das’ violent end (she is first killed and then raped by a man who wants to marry his very young daughter to an adult whereas Ila tried to convince him not to do it) obliges her to “accept the inexorable otherness of time that [she] desperately seeks to disown.” (Kamara 93). Nanda tries to reconstruct herself in “a process where she must necessarily both remember and reimagine her past” (Ho 30).

In part III we discover that Ila Das fights against time and with it: against because she tries to import progressive ideas concerning child marriage for example, so she opposes a long rooted tradition, but she also fights with time because she wants her society to progress. The two friends are treated in a different way by time, which can destroy or preserve (Kamara 93). Ila Das has fought to survive but time crushed her physically and she dies in horrible circumstances. On the other hand, Nanda has always had financial commodities and an ‘easy’ life so time preserved her from troubles but crushed her morally. Ila has a particular function in the novel: when she visits Nanda, she allows the reader to discover Nanda’s past as a wife and her childhood (Maya 144). Ila herself clings to her memories to save a sense of self-esteem: she used to be an important and wealthy woman whereas she is poor now. Her

¹² Sharma, R.S. *Anita Desai*. New Dehli: Arnold Heinemann, 1981, p. 120.

“glorious” past is also a way to catch the attention of society. There is a great discrepancy between Ila’s “anti-social” voice (this term is used by Nanda because Ila’s voice is very high pitched and horrible to listen to, thus it is hard for Ila to be completely integrated in society.) and what this voice speaks about: her miseries. It increases her pathos. Nanda is bothered by the gap between her memories and the truth which bounds Ila – a very loyal person – to her (Ho 30). Indeed, Nanda helped Ila when she was in trouble and found her a job, but Nanda does not want to have links with anyone and here she is forced into a friendship that time cannot free her from.

Raka too¹³ forced Nanda back into a past she wants to forget. But at the same time, Nanda finds shelter in her former memories. She lives another childhood through the tales she tells Raka but she cannot interest her and their roles are reversed: Nanda becomes a child who cannot get the attention of a severe parent. Childhood is developed from a romantic point of view: the immediacy of the experience lived by an individual disappears in adulthood. Raka can be perceived as a symbol for Nanda’s childhood, she is not yet included in the social and patriarchal order. Raka represents chaos in the social order, an order Nanda tries to run away from (Ho 26). Memories create a prison for Nanda as well as for Raka: when the latter is in the club, she sees a madhouse so her traumatic past transforms the present realities, to include them into her past and mix everything up. (Ho 27)

Time has acted upon the characters, as well as space. The problem of communication the characters experience reveals their alienation. It is interesting to notice how time and space act together to create dislocation in the characters’ selves, which result in a refusal or an inability to speak as a pathological reaction: for example Uma is determined by her Indian environment since her plight is linked to Indian traditions, but her alienation is also visible in the passage of time which isolates her more and more. Consequently, she is not able to express her feelings. These elements are present in Desai’s work to show how isolation manifests and acts upon the characters. Now we have to deal with another element, which is the individual’s reaction to these manifestations. It is interesting to notice how isolation triggers off a struggle for the characters to find themselves and create their identity.

¹³ The following statements are based on Raizada’s work, pp. 175-179.

III/ The awakening of the individual.

Some of the characters are finally aware of their tragic situation as the narrative unfolds; they begin to understand that they are victims of social pressure and that alienation is not the only solution or the only way of life. Some characters are able to react to this isolation. Three main reactions can be observed: rebellion and so the rejection of certain values, death which can be interpreted in different ways, or the quest for a new, chosen identity. We are going to see rebellion first and explore how it works in Desai's work.

1) Rebellion:

How can we define the concept of rebellion? In the Oxford dictionary online¹⁴, it is defined as “the action or process of resisting authority, control, or convention”. The origin of the word is interesting: “from Latin *rebellio*, *rebellis* (used originally with reference to a fresh declaration of war by the defeated), based on *bellum* 'war'”. Thus we can say that the characters in Desai's novels rebel when their plight becomes too painful to bear: they have been defeated for too long and they start their own war, but it is not necessarily an explosion of anger or cries.

In *The Village By The Sea*, we have a good example of an ambiguous rebellion. As we have already noted, the child Hari is forced into adulthood because of irresponsible parents. But at the same time he wants to control his destiny and he does not want to live a life of misery. The fact that he chooses to leave his family and to work in Bombay is also a way to say “no” to a life-style imposed by his parents. He chooses not to be like them but at the same time to help them. It is interesting here to compare several passages of the book: “At the same time the thought of sailing far, far out to sea and never coming back or else only with riches untold, attracted him strongly.” (Desai VS 47). He wants to be freed from a family which prevents him from being happy. “Perhaps if it really did turn into a factory site one day, he would stay on here, living a new kind of life. Otherwise he and his family would surely and slowly starve, fall ill like his mother, and die. No! He would go away – cross the sea in a boat, somehow find his fortune in Bombay...” (Desai VS 60). Here Hari has a kind of flash of indignation concerning his situation, and he does not evoke his family in this awakening, he wants to escape his family too to have a new life. It is reinforced by another passage: “ Could

¹⁴ <<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/rebellion?q=rebellion>>

he find himself a place in that rich, gleaming world of high-rise apartments, take part in that fairy-tale world of servants, cars, holidays, money and freedom?" (Desai VS 194). He clearly wants to break with his former life and try to live another one, so here we can see his rebellion.

We can see in this concept of rebellion a desire to break free from appearances and join reality. In *Fire on the Mountain*, Nanda tries this rebellion. Her isolation results from a long life of services rendered to husband and children, and a consequent desire to spend the rest of her life time in a quiet place, to rest and have some privacy. It is a life-affirming positive attitude: she wants to master her destiny but also to have answers to metaphysical questions as to what existence and life mean. Her life has been an illusion of happiness and now she looks for reality and the true meaning of her life. There is a very thin line between reality and illusion in the novel. To find meaning in one's existence, it is necessary to keep an equilibrium between the existing reality and the illusion which embraces it: the reality one lives in is also intertwined with illusion (for example, our senses can fail us: we are able to see a limited number of color wave lengths whereas more of them truly exist). To Pabby, principal of the Ram Lal Anand College (University of Delhi), the meaning of life can be found in a balance between the two concepts, because we are not able to grasp reality as a whole but also because sometimes we need to protect our sanity. This message is the affirmative and positive resonance in the novel (Pabby 32). At some point in the novel, Nanda announces to Raka that her mother is ill again: "Fantasy and fairy tales had their place in life, she knew it so well. Why then did she tell the child the truth? Who wanted truth? Who could stand it? Nobody. Not even herself. So how could Raka?" (Desai FOM 89). There is a double movement in this novel: a refusal to be blinded by the absurdity of a boring life, and an impulse to escape reality thanks to fantasy. Nanda rebels against her former life as an illusion, but to find meaning in life, it is necessary to go through fantasy: "Her projected childhood is an attempt to create the bond of love between herself and Raka" (Dubee 208). Indeed Nanda romanticizes her childhood to create something real, a feeling of affection between herself and her great grand-daughter. She uses illusion to colour reality and here, she rebels against her own isolation. On the other hand, Raka rebels against the reality she knows, building her own world in the forest: "She would return with her brown legs scratched, her knees bruised, sucking a finger stung by nettles, her hair brown under a layer of dust, her eyes very still and thoughtful as though she had visited strange lands and seen fantastic, improbable things that

lingered in the mind.” (Desai, FOM 46). The power of the mind can reconstruct in the characters what has been destroyed by a violent reality.

In *Fasting, Feasting*, Arun’s rebellion is particular. At first, he rejected his origins and did not want to mingle with other Indian students. He wanted to get rid of his family but he was motivated by his feelings of resentment. But at the end of the novel, he has changed: when he receives the parcel with the presents, “he has no extra space for them in his suitcase” (Desai FF 226). The suitcase can be interpreted as a metaphor: it expresses that Arun does not need his family any more in his luggage to live his life, he can go on his way alone. His new student room is “on the same floor as the other students this time” (Desai 226) as if he has found a balance between who he is (an Indian) and who he does not want to be (his parents). The book ends on his departure when he has given the presents to Mrs. Patton (we will look at this passage more precisely later): “He withdraws quietly, going up to collect his suitcase and then finding his way out by the kitchen door, leaving her sitting on the porch with the box of tea on her knees and the shawl around her shoulders.” (Desai FF 228). He clearly leaves a part of his past behind him and this ultimate gift represents his ultimate act of rebellion, but an act which is calm and attentive to someone else; this final act is completely opposed to the parental behavior because Arun cares about Mrs. Patton’s feelings: he leaves the presents to get rid of his own burden but he also wants to do something useful with them (“Please take these things” (Desai FF 228)). His Indian and his American past fuse in the figure of Mrs Patton but by leaving her behind, he chooses to follow his own way.

Uma develops her own rebellion too, but it takes the form of a silent resistance. At some point in the novel, Uma is reading poetry but she is interrupted by her mother, urging her to make tea. Mama also mocks Uma’s reading and points out that it is useless and that she is unable to understand poetry: “‘Rosebuds. Wild waltz. Pasionately,’ she screams at them silently. She tosses in sugar. ‘Madly. Vows. Fulfil,’ her silence roars at them. She clatters a spoon around the cup, spilling some into the saucer, and thrusts it at Papa. ‘Here,’ her eyes flash through her spectacles, ‘this, this is what I know. And you, you don’t.’” (Desai FF 137). Uma uses the words from the poetry she has read to create her strength and to build her silent resistance. The oxymoron “she screams at them silently” is striking because Uma does not express her pain and her revolt but words come to her mind to express that revolt. She chooses to keep these words to herself, so this particular point cannot be considered as a problem of communication: she finds there a privilege, the privilege of intimacy. Since

privacy is something very hard for her to get, she uses her freedom of thought as resistance against her oppressive parents.

The act of rebellion can thus be implicit (like Uma's case) and become a resistance. The act of rebellion itself is an assertion of one's existence and individuality, but we're going to see that death can also be used as a means to provoke the individual's awakening and a way to solve the problem of alienation.

2) Death:

In Desai's novels, death is a recurrent theme but it has two sides. Indeed it can be perceived as an act of "sabotage" or as an act of "salvation" (terms used by Roy 65). Death is not always physical, it can be used as an allegory and actually, we can see several 'social' deaths in the novels. We are going to analyze death when it is brought as a final solution chosen by the characters.

If we look at *Fasting, Feasting*, Mira Masi, Uma's widow aunt, is experiencing a social death: she has been rejected by her family since she has become a religious ascetic, but she is completely satisfied with this choice. Social death is her solution to fight social oppression but in her case it is also linked to her status: widows are outcasts in Indian society. In the same way, in the short story 'Surface Texture' (*Games at Twilight*), Harish who becomes a Swami renounces a normal social life and he is dead to his family and to society. This metaphorical death is a salvation to him whereas it is perceived as an act of sabotage by his wife. Similarly, Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain*, by withdrawing from society tries to save herself and to experience a social death: as we have seen all along this work, she wants to be forgotten and left alone in Carignano, she wants to "be a charred tree trunk in the forest" (Desai FOM 23). It reveals her desire to fight the isolation brought by social conventions: when her husband was alive, Nanda had to be the perfect wife of the Vice-Chancellor, and this role she did not want isolated her. Alone in Carignano, she wants to be socially 'dead'. She tries to reach salvation with social death.

In the short story 'A Devoted Son' (*Games at Twilight*) the plight of Varma is quite shocking: his son Rakesh has become a very famous and competent doctor. Varma grows older and is always sick so his son takes care of him, but it becomes excessive: "My own son. If I ask him for one more piece of bread, he says no, Papa, I weighed out the *ata* myself and I can't allow you to have more than two hundred grammes of cereal a day." (Desai GT

77). The father literally feels exploited and we can see that Rakesh's identity is completely outshone by the doctor's identity: he does not have the benevolence of a son, only the attention of the doctor. His point of view is too medical and not human enough and Varma's life becomes a prison from which he can escape thanks to death only. His wish to die is linked to two aspects: first he wants to get rid of his boring life in which he cannot eat what he wants, and second he is sick of old age and the pains that go with it. The behavior of his son isolates Varma and death is his solution against alienation, here it is really perceived as a relief. But his family prevents him from being relieved: "‘Let me be,’ Varma begged, turning his face away from the pills on the outstretched hand. ‘Let me die. It would be better. I do not want to live only to eat your medicines.’ ‘Papa, be reasonable.’" (Desai GT 79). It raises very current issues, for example the right to die with dignity; in this short story, death is a choice and a salvation, but it is still delayed, whereas when Raka (*Fire on the Mountain*) has made this choice, it is instantly implemented.

Indeed the most striking example of death is present in the book *Fire on the Mountain*. Some characters in Desai's novels are obsessed by death, they are usually unhappy because unsatisfied and in order to get what they want, they turn towards "sabotage" or violence. It is the case with Raka, she is violent when, at the end of the novel, she starts a fire in the forest. Violence leads to destruction. Raka goes against the current, struggles against her own fear and her dark aspect so she uses violence to survive (Roy 66-70-71). Actually, the violence of death conveyed by the fire is a way for Raka to express her distress to the world. Death by fire is her solution to fight the social pressure that isolates her. But here it is a kind of salvation: Raka feels a "mystic pleasure" when she finds shelter in the ruin after her walk, and fire is stuck in the middle of her consciousness, she always thinks about it. Her desire to use fire to fight the darkness around her is strong. "As if to voice the silent bursting of Nanda's self, Raka sets the hill-side to fire." (Raizada 177-179). This fire is highly symbolical and highlights the characters of Raka and Nanda. It mirrors their tormented lives and minds. "In the end, the emotional volcano of sorrow and suffering" of both characters emerges and makes a real appearance on the mountain (Malik 183). The fire embodies the violence of feelings and a strong resolution to end such a life. But fire is also a powerful light, used to find meaning in a dark existence, and a strong purifier. It destroys in order to annihilate certain traditions and to leave space for new values:

L'incendie dévore tous les espoirs d'une vie dynamique, fondée sur le modèle du club et des chansonnettes stupides, vie hypocrite, nostalgique pour les expatriés qui cherchent à recréer leur pays, mais qui mesurent l'aliénation de la classe dominante indienne qui l'a adoptée. L'usine pharmaceutique brûle aussi et rejette des produits meurtriers. Kajali Sharma, critique littéraire indienne, y voit la violence du monde extérieur mais aussi la tentative de Raka d'en finir avec cette violence. Il s'agirait donc d'une révolte venue d'une nouvelle génération de femmes. (Jagtiani 171)

Fire also destroys what colonization attempted to build in Carignano. In this way it is truly an Indian feminine revolt which is expressed. Raka affirms her Indian power over the British and she finally embodies a feminine identity. This identity also belongs to outcasts, to free, wild, and limitless minds, like fire itself (Jagtiani 173). “‘Look, Nani, I have set the forest on fire. Look, Nani – look – the forest is on fire.’ Tapping, then drumming, she raised her voice, then raised her head to look in and saw Nanda Kaul on the stool with her head hanging, the black telephone hanging, the long wire dangling.” (Desai, FOM 145). Here, Nanda has just learnt that Ila Das has been killed and this news already leads her towards her own death. All the forms in -ing suggest a slow movement of balance, nearly in suspense. But the verbs qualifying Raka are striking: to tap, to drum and to raise. She is a more consistent character and she has suddenly grown. Raka is fully conscious of her new ‘power’ linked to fire and to the freedom of choice.

Death is a radical choice or solution to fight alienation. Some characters have deeper needs and want to learn who they really are. If identity is at first annihilated by social pressure, then the characters experience an epiphany and start a journey to discover their true personality.

3) Quest of identity:

The crisis of identity is linked to characters that are different from the average man, different because of the sensitive way they live. Desai creates an ambivalent world in her fiction: the characters want to reach harmony but it is rarely achieved; there is a wish to enjoy life but which is confronted to the desire to keep every feeling locked inside oneself. The characters “claim a right of ‘self-assertion’” to build and make sense of their own individuality (Bala and Pabby 3).

As we have seen, in *The Village By The Sea*, Hari rebels. After his experience in Bombay, he comes out of the ordeal with an increased stature and he truly understands who he is, that he is a boy from the country-side and that he cannot deceive himself. He is not a

man from the city, but to him this is not truly a quest, since he does not want to find who he really is, it is not his main concern. However he is able to notice the change in himself: “He knew he could make choices and decisions now. [...] he had known that he belonged to Thul and that he would go back. It was wonderful to be able to choose what you wanted to do in life...”(Desai VS 212). His former rebellion has opened his eyes: it was necessary for him to go through it, to cut contact with his family that he loves but that enclosed him in misery, and then to go back to them, stronger. “He suddenly felt he was not a child any longer, that he was a man.”(Desai VS 214). A new Hari is born, a man, who can face up to his responsibilities. Thus the family circle can be reconstructed and the children can get out of their isolation.

In the short story ‘Studies in the Park’ (*Games at Twilight*) the student Suno is also overwhelmed by his family (*cf* Part I). But he is finally transformed by a scene he witnesses in the park where he was studying: “Then I saw the scene that stopped it all, stopped me just before I died. [...] They never looked at anyone else, only at each other, with an expression that halted me. It was tender, loving, yes, but in an inhuman way, so intense. Divine, I felt, or insane.” (Desai GT 30). He observes a couple – a Muslim woman and an old man – and the scene transforms his perception of the world and of himself. It is not a voluntary rebellion against his family, he does not want to stand against them, he wants to find who he is. He understands that his true identity is not to be a student. “[Suno] realized that life is not meant to be lived like a rat-race at which each must excel over the other. Rather, life is a search and the best way to go along this path of search is to involve oneself gently and tenderly with everything life has to offer.”(Bhatnagar SSAD 199). Suno looks for the real meaning of his life and he has to find himself first. “[My father] says I am hopeless but that I need help. I just laugh but I know that he knows that I will never come up to that hurdle or cross it – life has taken a different path for me, in the form of a search, not a race as it is for him, for them.” (Desai GT 32). Suno’s solution to stand against the alienation created by his student life is to find his identity and to be different from other people.

The short story ‘Scholar and Gypsy’ (*Games at Twilight*) is also representative of the quest of identity.¹⁵ India is perceived as an exotic country where the mystic can be experienced. The journey is thus becoming a quest even unconsciously. The experience of India blurs the concepts of “native” and “foreign”. For Pat, native means to come from rural Vermont, so she is foreign in India. But she seems to find her place in the hippy community,

¹⁵ The following paragraph is based on Elaine Yee Lin Ho’s work, pp. 69-72.

to belong with these people. Her husband David is a foreigner to this community whereas he is familiar with India. When he understands his wife's attraction for the hippies, "David has arrived in the 'India' of his wife's gothic imagination, and his arrival is co-terminous with the start of her relocation in another 'India' of her own making." (Ho 72). Experiencing India in a physical way, Pat rejects intellectualization. It is part of her identity as a child from Vermont raised in a natural world. At first Pat rejected India and stayed under the thumb of an authoritarian husband; then when she discovers that she can belong to a community where she can find true values, she starts to find a new truth and her new identity: "'You, you don't even know it's possible to find Buddha in a Hindu temple. Why, you can find him in a church, a forest, anywhere. Do you think he is as narrow-minded as you?' she flung at him, and the explosiveness with which this burst from her showed how much his derision has cut into her." (Desai GT 137-138). This passage is nearly at the end of the novel and it is the last words they exchange in direct speech. Pat has been exploring temples in the mountains and they awoke new emotions in her which allowed her to access to a new truth and her true identity.

If we look at *Fasting, Feasting*, the quest for identity is a very important theme in the second part of the book. Mrs Patton, who embodies the American way of life, does not really act as a mother. When she discovers her daughter's sickness, she truly becomes a mother with motherly preoccupations: "Mrs Patton has cleaned [Melanie's room] herself, on her knees." (Desai FF 227). Here, her position "on her knees" shows how she is affected by her daughter's illness, and by the fact that she was blind to Melanie's problem. At the end of the novel the East has integrated a part of her and helped her to become a real mother (Sinha 89): Arun gives her the presents he has received from his family, as a ritual to start her new identity as a mother. "He withdraws quietly, going up to collect his suitcase and then finding his way out by the kitchen door, leaving her sitting on the porch with the box of tea on her knees and the shawl around her shoulders." (Desai FF 228). These are the last words of the novel and the last image is a fusion between East and West in the character of Mrs Patton. Arun's departure is very calm and humble. Among another troubled family, his frail individuality has emerged; he is a silent character who shapes his personality with his inner comments on the Pattons (Ho 91-92).

The example of Uma is perfect to illustrate the individual's awakening and the quest for an identity. Twice in the novel she is strongly attracted by water. Let us compare the two passages in question: in the first one, Uma is amazed by her widow aunt Mira Masi who

comes to visit. This woman is devoted to her Lord Shiva, and seems to include Uma more than anyone else in her rituals: “Now Mira-masi included her in the celebration, she was counted in, a member, although of what, she could not say.” (Desai FF 43). We can notice Uma’s first step towards acceptance of herself, which is unconscious here: she truly belongs to some community (her aunt’s) when her family does not want to include her in their circle. So Uma’s experience with water happens when Mira-masi takes her, Aruna and Arun to the river for some rituals:

Only Uma tucked her frock up into her knickers and waded in with such thoughtless abandon that the pilgrims, the washermen, the priests and boatmen all shouted, ‘Watch out! Take care, child!’ and pulled Uma back before she sank up to her chin and the currents carried her away. It had not occurred to her that she needed to know how to swim, she had been certain the river would sustain her. (Desai FF 43)

Uma can be perceived as a mystic here, at least she seems to have a sort of revelation, since her attraction to water lacks all logic or reason. In the last sentence, we understand that she perceives water as something powerful which does not need any human strength. She experiences an epiphany, water would have been an ally to her, to help her and carry her burdens in life; Uma is strongly linked to spirituality, her place is not among a family which rejects her but among a spiritual community (*cf* part I, her relation to the ashram). Her true nature speaks and rejects the way her family wants to shape her. Her second contact with water is striking too: it happens when she is older and her sister Aruna, who is now married, comes to visit the family so they go to the river:

Uma thrilled by this license, simply sprang off the prow and plunged in without hesitation, as if this were what she had been preparing to do all her life. [...] What it was then when she had plunged into the dark water and let it close quickly and tightly over her, the flow of the river, the current, drew her along, clasping her and dragging her with it. It was not fear she felt, or danger. Or, rather, there were only what edged something much darker, wilder, more thrilling, a kind of exultation – it was exactly what she had always wanted, she realized. Then they had saved her. The saving was what made her shudder and cry... (Desai FF 111).

Her experience is cosmic; she is freed from a life that does not suit her. Water is very symbolical here for it leads Uma towards a new birth and new feelings of absolute. In Hinduism, water has “spiritually cleansing powers”¹⁶. These experiences seem to be the purpose of her whole life. Since she does not know how to swim, she attracts the attention of

¹⁶ <http://history-of-hinduism.blogspot.fr/2010/06/water-and-hinduism.html>

people and she provokes her family, wandering from the straight and narrow. She is experiencing something that fills the hole in her life and builds her identity.

Basically, we have seen that three solutions are possible to fight isolation but some characters are not able to find a solution. For example in *Fire on the Mountain*, Ila Das is murdered, but death is not her choice, she is erased from the story without having solved her problems. Ila Das does not have negative forces in her personality but the end of the book shows how violence can intrude in society and life (Pabby 32).

Conclusion

The characters in Desai's novels struggle with isolation and alienation. If social pressure is the main root of such a feeling, the characters themselves are ill-fitted in society and feel deeply different from average people. Their sensitiveness makes them suffer but also creates their consistence. Desai uses a great variety of devices to convey her characters' feelings, and without being too explicit or pathetic, she conveys her message with subtlety. The characters are confronted to several solutions (rebellion, death, finding a new identity) but it does not erase the negativity and the pessimism which are two omnipresent concepts in Desai's novels. Her characters try to catch the essence and the meaning of their lives but to understand life, it is necessary to create relationships with other people and in a more global way with the community of these people, and with humanity as a whole (Pabby 40). Bounds between people are necessary to survive: Pat in 'Scholar and Gypsy' finds a new identity within the hippy community; Suno in 'Studies in the Park' rebels and create some links with people in the park to escape his family; Uma in *Fasting, Feasting* has some kinship with her aunt Mira-Masi, her cousin Ramu or the Christian sisters in her school; on the other hand, Raka and Nanda, who have difficulty creating links, die. The other can be a tormenter but he is often necessary to live, to allow one's creation as an individual.

In a way, we can say that the characters experiencing alienation and isolation are deeply determined by what was analysed in the first two parts, that is to say the context in which they live: society, family, culture, country and time. In fact, all these elements shape the characters in a certain way and they precisely try to fight this determinism using their free will. If they are aware of this environment that shapes them, they have already made a step towards free-will, even if they do not act concretely. For example, Arun in *Fasting, Feasting* is at first determined by his Indian past: he has difficulty eating American food, he studies in a foreign country because his parents have decided it and he spends the summer with the Patton family because his parents decided it too. He perceives his American environment with his Indian references and culture. For example he cannot stand to see a woman wearing a swimsuit. But at the same time, he rejects his origins: he does not want to meet other Indian students. At the end of the book, he accepts his identity as an Indian (his new student room is next to other Indian students' rooms) but rejects the presents from his parents. His identity is

determined by his origins (he is Indian) but by rejecting his parents, his free-will is also activated to create his personality.

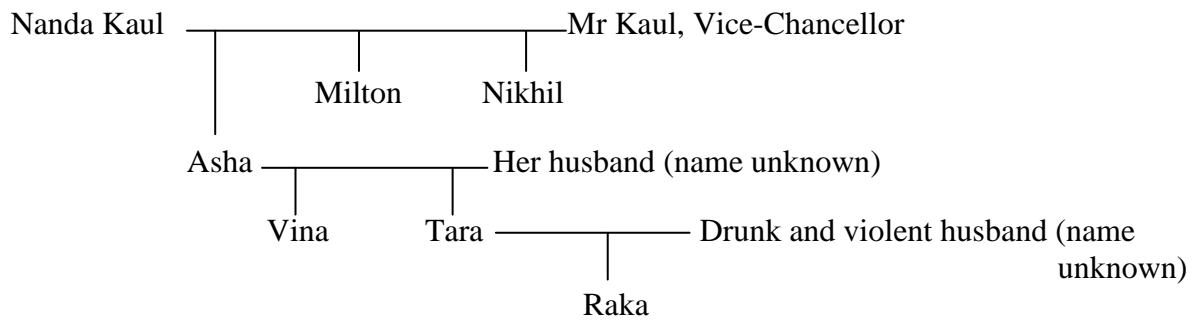
The problematic I chose may be not precise enough for a work of thirty-five or forty pages and the corpus too voluminous. Indeed when I did my research, I found that I had a lot of materials and information concerning this subject and I had to select very carefully what was essential. It was quite hard since everything was very interesting but the pruning was necessary. Maybe this subject of isolation and alienation deserves to be worked on more deeply, for a thesis for example. I have the feeling that I skimmed through the question and the books, so the reading of my work may be a little frustrating. But I really enjoyed reading these books, thanks to this work I learnt a lot of things about India and I still want to learn more about this country.

Shymala A. Narayan and Jon Mee quote Anita Desai in their work: “Writing is to me a process of discovering the truth – the truth that is nine-tenth of the iceberg that lies submerged beneath the one-tenth visible portion we call Reality. Writing is my way of plunging to the depth and exploring this underlying truth. [...] My novels are no reflection of Indian society, politics, or character.”(Mee and Narayan 227). The function of the writer is here put in question: is it to describe the world, to find the essence of life, to show reality? To Desai, her role is to find the truth that lies beyond Reality. But implicitly politics and society, which represent Reality, are present in her work (for example arranged marriages and their consequences are described in *Fasting, Feasting* with characters like Uma or her cousin Anamika). Discovering the truth, which is a metaphysical concept to Desai probably linked to the essence of life, cannot be detached from our current world which shapes who we are and how we perceive the concepts of truth and Reality. Our Reality shapes the perception of the truth. With the metaphor of the iceberg, we can say that Reality and truth are not separable; they are made with the same piece of ice.

Appendix

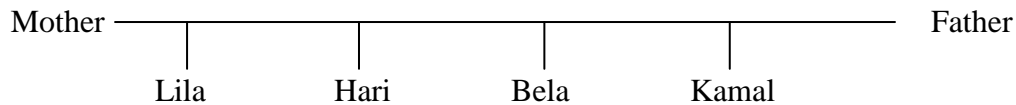
Main characters of the novels.

Fire on the Mountain



Ila Das, Nanda's friend.

The Village by the Sea



Ramu: One of Hari's friends

Biju: a rich fisherman from Thul who is building a motorboat.

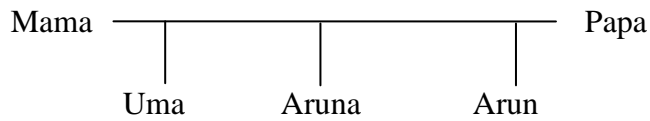
De Silvas Family : Rich family from Bombay, come to Thul for their holidays in a house next to the sea and Hari's family do their housework.

Jagu: Hari's first employer in the restaurant.

Mr Panwallah: Hari's second employer. He teaches him how to mend watches.

Sayyid Ali: speaker in Bombay against the destruction of Thul. Comes to Thul and stay at the de Silvas' house to observe birds.

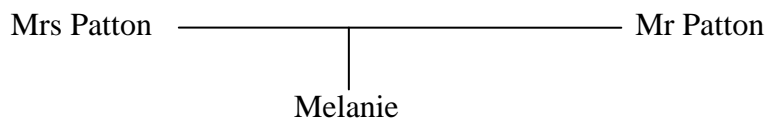
Fasting, Feasting.



Anamika: Uma's, Aruna's and Arun's cousin. It is not clear if she is the daughter of Mama's or Papa's brother, Uncle Bakul.

Ramu: Anamika's brother. Close to Uma, his cousin.

Mira-Masi: "[she] was not [Mama's] sister but a very distant relative, the second or possibly even the third wife of a relative Mama preferred not to acknowledge at all." Mira-Masi's link to the family is quite mysterious.



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Résumé:

Dans ce court travail de recherche, je me suis intéressée à plusieurs œuvres d'Anita Desai, écrivaine indienne: *Games at Twilight* (recueil de nouvelles), *The Village By The Sea* (roman), *Fire on the Mountain* (roman) et *Fasting Feasting* (roman). A travers cette étude, j'ai tenté d'éclaircir comment les personnages de ces œuvres se débattaient avec les sentiments d'isolation et d'aliénation. J'ai donc procédé en trois temps : d'abord, je me suis penchée sur la pression sociale, origine du problème, exercée sur ces personnages : la famille, l'échec des mariages, la représentation subversive de la maison. Ensuite, j'ai analysé comment l'isolation et l'aliénation se manifestaient dans l'écriture d'Anita Desai et comment les personnages exprimaient ces concepts, à travers les problèmes de communication, l'analyse de l'espace et du temps. Enfin, j'ai étudié la prise de conscience de ces personnages, qui peut se traduire par une révolte, le choix de mourir ou de se construire une identité nouvelle.

Mots clés:

Littérature, isolation, aliénation, société indienne, identité.

Key Words:

Literature, isolation, alienation, Indian society, identity.

