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A Pilgrimage to the West: Unsettling Images of India and Canada in Anita Desai’s “Winterscape”

Cécile Girardin

1 The *topos* of the visit to a successful child in the West relies on the fantasy of stasis on the one hand (recovering the somewhat mythical past of a reunified family) and of change on the other (leaving poor, underdeveloped India for good). This *topos* is one of the defining features of the contemporary world, characterized by flows of migrants hoping for better lives, and such journeys are now part of the Indian psyche as much as pilgrimages to the holy places of Hinduism can be. In the context of the Indian diaspora, the comparison with the pilgrimage is particularly potent as one of the taboos of Hinduism concerns the so-called crossing of the “black waters” (*kala pani*), strictly forbidden because it endangers caste.[1] Desai’s ironic description of an apparently victorious return to the motherland points to the vacuity of a competition over stories that are fabricated out of the material attributes of success (houses, cars, appliances). The feelings of pride and hope that these topical success stories elicit inevitably carry a darker side made of guilt and frustration, which is not allowed to transpire. Postcolonial literature, in particular that of Indian writers who settled abroad, abounds with these untold stories of maladjustment, misunderstanding and mere despair arising from displacement.[2] But few works have specifically focused on that transitory moment of the visit of relatives who have come to see for themselves and who end up profoundly transformed by the journey, as in a pilgrimage. The microcosm of the short story is particularly fitted to encapsulate the transient yet life-changing character of such a paradigmatic contemporary moment. “A Winterscape,” a short story featured in Anita Desai’s 2000 collection *Diamond Dust*, explores what lies untold behind the material symbols of success, by focusing on that “round-trip” journey across the Atlantic Ocean. In “Winterscape,” two old widowed sisters from India embark on a transatlantic journey to Canada where the son of one of them, Rakesh, lives with his Canadian wife, Beth. What could be seen as a traditional family reunion triggered by a ritual of passage (the wife of the adored son giving birth to a much-hoped-for son), is

complicated by the introduction of an uncanny situation. A long time ago, the man's mother gave him up for adoption to her own sister in the context of an unusual family situation. Both women raised the boy, and he sees them both as his mothers–hence their visiting *together*–even if the aunt holds a slightly more motherly role than the actual, biological mother. The switching of roles introduces a quirk in the story and the intercultural tale is allowed to move into unexplored terrains.

2 During this transitional moment contained in time and space, the encounter between the elderly relatives from India and the Westernized younger generation articulates the issues of stasis and change. The dialectic between the settler and the belated, temporary onlookers who have crossed the oceans to meet in Toronto, is explored thanks to an emphasis on the exchange of looks–the visitors from India peering over the unfamiliar and the unexpected, the hosts looking back at them critically. This article contends that the short story aims at exploring a breach in diasporic time: the visitors impose a moment of unsettlement and self-reflection on the relative who moved away and this untimeliness gives way to an intricate narrative of change in stasis. Desai achieves this by resorting to a style which makes ample use of the visual in order to endow the story with a visually-arrested quality.

I. A game at twilight: on the threshold of storytelling

3 The short story's main narrative device consists in the staging of a photograph, which works as a key to unlock meaning. In the incipit, a mother stands with her baby in her arms and teaches him the names of family members by looking at pictures taped on the refrigerator and by uttering emphatically: "'That's Daddy, in his new car!' Or 'Susan and cousin Ted, on his first birthday!'" (24). This initiatory, pre-linguistic scene acquires a metaphysical overtone: the activity of pointing a finger at the pictures is mimicked by the baby who "jabs his short pink finger at a photograph" (24) and who repeats the names awkwardly: "'Da-dee!' the baby shouts. 'Soo-sun!'" (24). By entering *logos*, identification is allowed to take place and the baby becomes "part of the family" (24). Conjuring up meaning and feeling from images, comparable as it is to a god-like gesture, also points at the process of storytelling. It is as if the photos had a magic character, similar to a visual open sesame to an alternative world. Fiction is hinted at in the "game" the mother plays with the baby and in the aesthetic quality of the photographic composition to be seen on the refrigerator, "bright and festive as bits of tinsel or confetti" (24). One photograph in particular channels a desire to cross that threshold and to aim at the reverse side of the image. This is the photograph, taken during their visit, of the two widows, viewed from behind, as they are looking at the snow-covered landscape throughout the window. Whereas the other photographs displayed on the fridge are colorful and straightforward in meaning (the reader can easily picture what they are, how the people in them look, smiling and striking a pose), this one, colorless, faceless, inexplicable, introduces a gap in the series. With its kaleidoscopic series of reflections, its cascading composition made of looks, lenses and frames, it traces a maze-like path, taking the reader to where storytelling lies, that is to say in opacity and magic. The image intercepts the narrator's function, which is to "rid all stories of explanations," according to Walter Benjamin: "we can tell the extraordinary and the marvelous with the greatest accuracy, but we can't impose on the reader the psychological sequence of events" (Benjamin 212).[3]

4 The description lingers over the photograph, the narrative zooming in closely to grasp its details. “A photo almost entirely white” (25) calls for a closer examination, as “they seem nearly to have merged” (25) in the white backdrop, as if the photographer had come to rescue the sisters from being swallowed by their radically new environment. Disappearance prevails in that scene, overflowing as it is with blinding “whiteness,” the color of widows and mourning in India. But whiteness also symbolizes transfiguration in the Christian tradition, which is made plain in the impression of an irradiating light. The photograph works as a bridge between two worlds, two cultures, and conjures up the notion of a pivotal moment. The immediate reaction of the mother is to say nothing: “The photo somehow calls for silence, creates silence, like snow” (25). But speech finally returns and this photo, too, and triggers knowledge: “She sings softly: ‘Ma and Masi–Ma and Masi together’” (25). Meaning is flowing but in a different way: the name is “sung” as in a lullaby, and Ma and Masi presented as a unit. The chanted repetition creates a soothing, motherly feeling, and literally puts the baby to sleep. This time he does not try to utter the names, he just experiences the performative power of language and of storytelling. It points at the “twilight existence” of the image, as described by Levinas, to be seen in “the very event of obscuring, a descent into night, into an invasion of the shadow” (Bhabha 1994 15). This description, strongly determined by magic and opacity, acquires a mythical dimension. The photo is a trace unsettling the immutable force of nature: “The image [...] makes visible an interruption of time by a movement going on the hither side of time, in its interstices” (15). This interruption of speech, consciousness–life almost–becomes the idea ruling the whole story.

5 Much like the photo, the narrative structure of “Winterscape” is interrupted and layered thanks to a series of flashbacks: the story of how the visit was agreed on by the inviting couple, the background story of the sisters in India, and the visit itself. The focalizer, Beth, is made to meander through those embedded narratives, told in a consistent yet discontinuous manner. The reader has access to her metamorphosing state of mind, continuously unsettled by the various temporalities and narratives at work. A closer examination of her inner feelings at the beginning of the narrative will substantiate this claim:

> [Beth] felt herself tense at the thought of not just one, but two strangers, foreigners, part of Rakesh’s past, invading their house. She had already wished she had not allowed Rakesh to send for his mother to attend to the birth of their child. It had seemed an outlandish, archaic idea even when it was first suggested; now it was positively bizarre (26).

6 Memory and anticipation are articulated in tension, heightened by the use of the pluperfect, which inflates the temporal depth of the story. The character’s opinion forms over time and is allowed to strengthen: from “outlandish” and “archaic” to “positively bizarre”. It also postpones the moment of the visit, by making it virtual and conjectural, thus redoubling the fictive dimension of storytelling. It also allows the writer to depict the expecting mother as being in critical need of self-assertion and self- definition, since the visiting women embody a challenge to the very idea of motherhood. “Bizarre” echoes the feeling that emanated from the photograph and the need to unpack a mysterious story.

II. Translating an Indian fairy tale–or not quite

7 The question of cultural translation and of intercultural relationships, a critical issue given the main plot and characters, receives a literary treatment that is both understated and bold. "Winterscape" engraves India in the Canadian imaginary in various ways: by telling the story of the sisters in India, by relating the visit itself and by recording its trace in a photographic archive. More importantly, this presence of India is deposited on the Canadian character, who acts as the main connector between narratives, in a way that renews diasporic narratives.[4]

8 The flashback dedicated to the story of the sisters focuses on the various ways in which they, as little girls, then wives and mothers in patriarchal, rural India, failed to fulfill the expectations of their families. This theme recurs in Anita Desai's writing, devoted for a large part to the daily experience of women in India, their subdued struggle against the overwhelming desires of the extended family and the subtle disruptions of roles strictly defined by Hindu orthodoxy. The younger daughter's birth creates family "disappointment" (28) and she develops a talent for making herself "invisible" (28), her inability to meet her parents' wishes complete with her "unexpected nimbleness of the mind" (29). The words "unexpected" and "unexpectedness" punctuate this story which consistently points at the displacement process at work in the way people envision Others: the gaze that is being returned is always split, echoing a failed identification process but also the possibility of an escape. The invisibility of the girl, yet her presence in the family, recalls the uncanny photograph. It highlights an Indian complex, where the "dominant principle celebrates the abrogation if not the very extinction of personality" (Vaidyanathan 148).[5] As a case in point, roles are played to perfection during immutable rites, like weddings, but in the same way they conceal small enactments of resistance:

> Anu kept her face and her tears hidden throughout the wedding, as brides did, and Asha was both consoling and encouraging, as women were. Unexpectedly, that unpromising young man who blinked through his spectacles and could scarcely croak one sentence at a time, showed no hesitation whatsoever when it came to fathering a child. Nor did Anu, who was so slight of frame and mousy in manner, seem to be in any way handicapped as a woman or mother–her child was born easily, and it was a son (31).

9 The body seems to register resistance in telling ways, against social processes on which characters have no control. This process is inscribed in the abrupt syntactical change between the first sentence and the others. The first one, with its rigid, almost epiphoric structure, imposes closure on meaning. The repetition of "as brides did" and "as women were" refers to ritual orders which constrain and lock the sentence. What follows on the contrary is overflowing and excessive, as well as definite ("no [...] whatsoever", "nor [...] in any way"). It knows no syntactic restraint, as shown in the hypotactic style. Desai gives voice to a specifically Indian vision of freedom, since she subtly configures resistance in terms of acceptance. What would be viewed as submissive in the West, where individual freedom requires an access to autonomy against repressive forces, as John Stuart Mill would have it, is no less than rebellious in Desai's writing. As a matter of fact, her obscenely thriving as a wife and mother is off-limits, barely concealing the Hindu taboo of sensuality: "Freedom for the archetypal Indian has never been merely freedom from the thralldom of some malevolent tyrant but freedom from the empire of the senses" (Vaidyananthan 150). This unusual

empowerment process is given a further twist, when the mother literally gives her son away to her sister in an attempt to soothe the loss of her husband. From then on, she becomes a pariah, since she compromised her role as wife and mother, literally killing her husband: the narrative hints at "rumours," "mocking voices" (33), but marvels at the fact that she was "not too perturbed" (34). The death of both husbands comes as the apex of their sisterly empire, since they made the men altogether dispensable and lived a fulfilling life at odds with the patriarchal society.

10 The effect of this unusual tale is doubly unsettling for a Canadian audience: Beth tries to translate it into her own terms, but she fails. "Then the woman you call Ma–she is really your aunt?" (34); "When did they tell you?" (34): her questions point at a desperate need to locate clear-cut places in the family and to unveil a secret for good. But the answers complicate her incomprehension: "I always knew her as my mother" (34), he answers, and "I don't know [...] I grew up knowing it" (34). Again, the story returns on the terrain of pre-linguistic, intuitive knowledge, and opens up a gap between the man and his wife who feels estranged and excluded. The conversation hints at the impossibility to translate: "didn't your real mother [...] try to take you away?" (34); "didn't they ever fight? Or disagree about the way you were brought up?" (35); and repeatedly he answers, "It wasn't like that" (35; 36). The Canadian woman comes across a worldview which is fundamentally alien to her, and her own categories are useless in her attempt to grasp what she experiences as nonsense. When her husband tries to translate into terms that *he* thinks she could understand, like "the love sisters feel" (35) or "she is a reader, Beth, like you" (35), the comparison fails, since Beth does not feel such a love for her sister, and in fact would resent such a bond: "Nothing, no one, could make me do that" (35).

11 By focusing on the Canadian character, Desai makes use of cultural difference in a minimal way: this argument between husband and wife over the opaque childhood of one of them carries a universal undercurrent, since it cannot be categorized as more Indian than Canadian for that matter. The son fiercely resists appropriation by the Western ideological framework defining Beth's questions about jealousy, education, and individual autonomy, and this resistance might in turn explain why he kept his story secret till then. The story poses the untranslatable as carrying an ethical value in intercultural communication, but also in relationships in general, as Françoise Kral explains:

> It is precisely when a culture cannot be compared to others, when its singularity and difference assert themselves more powerfully than the similarities with our own culture that we are on to something, that we start to grasp cultural differences, not the essence but the actual existence of cultural diversity (Kral 25).

12 "Grasping" diversity is what is at work in the continuous displacement contained in the answers Rakesh makes to her, and the story celebrates the acknowledgement of difference, that is to say of what cannot be translated.

13 The absence of satisfying answers to her repeated questions creates a sense of helplessness in the young woman, which she expresses non-verbally. She removed "her hand from his temple and [placed] it on her belly" (35): the uncanny situation is hers to cope with, and her body registers her ambivalence yet absolute commitment to him. The move away from the man's body may refer to the provisional character of love marriages, dependent as they are upon the free-will of individuals: her move is suspended upon a conditional proof of honesty but the extended hand that can go both

ways defines love marriage as resorting to an "extension of personality" (Vaidyanathan 148). Desai seems to be pitting the relative autonomy of women in the West against the Indian sense of marital duty: that way she indirectly suggests a similarity between the closeness of the young couple and the irreducible bond between sisters, a by-product of failed "archaic" arranged marriages.

III. Story-telling as sharing experience

14 Suspending judgment and readjusting one's creeds work as the guiding principles of the short story, especially when it explores self-reflective processes. In a passage that owes more to drama than to narrative genres, Desai stages a scene where Beth discloses the story of her husband's mothers to her own mother, making for a gripping play behind closed doors. "Never heard of anything so daft!" (36): the way the Canadian mother appropriates the news is comparable to the rejection of the Indian family. She belittles the adoption process, "as if it were a birthday present" (37), and voices stereotypes about secretive, cunning Asians by questioning the very honesty of Rakesh: "Looks as if he never told you who his mother was" (36); "I thought they had money: he keeps talking about that farm as if they were landlords" (37). This passage makes use of the host country's prejudices prevalent in the lower middle class her mother inhabits, which is made clear in the remark about Beth's sister "living with her jobless, worthless husband in a trailer [...] with a string of children" (35) as well as in the characterization of the mother, in her "housecoat" and a cigarette dangling from her lips.

15 The commonplace story of the struggling migrant is displaced and reversed. It is the host who is speechless when faced with such successful, thoughtful career planning: "they sold [the farm] a bit at a time. They helped pay for our house, too" (37). This time Beth succeeds in translating the Indian presence into their territory, and she herself experiences cultural displacement when she cannot take her mother's reactions anymore: "Now you've spilt your coffee!" (37). Her inner rage is channeled in nonverbal expressions of resistance and this highlights the existence of what Bill Ashcroft calls a "transnational" space: "exile, as a condition of displacement, begins within the nation, it does not begin once borders have been crossed" (Ashcroft 75).[6] The various subject positions that she occupies throughout the short story (as a wife, as a daughter, as a step-daughter, and then as a mother) lead her to articulate her own identity in rather contingent ways. With her mother, she clearly resorts to class-based criticism: she overtly rejects what her mother embodies when she voices her prejudices, and that way she contributes to disseminate her "transnational" identification. By choosing to make the story permeate outside the close-knit community formed by the couple, Desai stages a process of storytelling whereby experience is shared: the transatlantic experience trickles down into the inner layers of the host society and the interstitial place occupied by the Indian relatives overflows. The structure of the short story, made of a series of short vignettes disconnected in terms of space and time, creates–like the photograph–multiple procedures of connecting and transferring: "What the storyteller says comes from experience–his own experience or experience that has been communicated to him. In turn he makes it an experience for those who listen to his story" (Benjamin 209).[7] The oral quality of the scene, as well as the presence of deictic markers, emphasize the circulation at work between storyteller and audience. Desai stages the split Canadian family as an "ambivalent nation-space," which becomes "the

crossroads to a new transnational culture. The ‘other’ is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we think we speak most intimately and indigenously ‘between ourselves’” (Bhabha, 1990 4). This process conveys a political overtone to a story which is deliberately domestic, focused as it is on women who stay at home.

IV. Untimely onlookers

16 The actual visit, which is the *raison d'être* of the story, produces an exchange of looks registering a difference, as well as a painful negotiation between the idea of the Other and reality. “It was ten years since Rakesh had seen his mothers” (41): this huge time gap contradicts the way people are used, in the contemporary world, to travelling and defying spatial constraints. If the transatlantic journey is “commonplace”, it is not compulsory and one of the first consequences of the visit is to allow the body to occupy center stage again. The first impression consists in a reevaluation in terms of perspective and size: “Rakesh was embarrassed by their skimpy apparel, Beth unexpectedly moved. She had always thought of them as having so much; now her reaction was: they have so little!” (41). The transatlantic journey makes possible a readjustment of distances, sizes and scales, in a move counter to that of globalization where “space has become [...] above all emancipated from the natural constraints of the human body” (Bauman 17). “From here on, people can't be separated by physical obstacles or by temporal distances. [...] distinctions of *here* and *there* no longer mean anything” (17-18). With bodies materializing however, the “original” of the image is finally met and calls for re-adjustment: in fact, it enables proper individual appropriation, shown in the different ways in which Beth and Rakesh react to their guests.

17 Desai relies heavily on the nonverbal to describe the visit of the Indian sisters, characterized by linguistic impotence: “[Rakesh] had forgotten the people they spoke of, had not the slightest interest in who had married whom, or sold land or bought cattle” (45). Embarrassed and ill at ease around them, he inversely provides Beth with the token of love and recognition which she had questioned earlier and establishes their intercultural marriage as irreducible. The relief is to be seen in the way Desai describes the actual stay in Toronto: their utter inability to adapt to Western life is treated as comedy (their refusal to wear proper shoes, their awe at the kitchenware or the television channels, and so on). In no way is difference a source of pathos: on the contrary, it is the very inability of the women to accommodate what is new that makes them particularly strong and resisting. Their frailty yet strong-willed passive resistance disrupts the now common image of the global traveler: “They clearly preferred to stay in” (42) instead of taking advantage of the city sights and shopping. Their domestic preference runs counter to the accepted rules of contemporary tourism but also to the representation of the active woman, who gives way to her autonomy in the outside world. The presence of open, prying eyes infuriates, at times, the increasingly impatient mother-to-be: “She found she could not [read] at home where the two mother would watch her as she read, intently, as if waiting to see where it would take her” (44). The three women locked inside the house perform a cat-and-mouse ballet defined by their mutual expectations. By staying in, the sisters enact an interruption of time and space, recalling the Chekhovian sisters in the lyrical treatment of solitude,

confinement and thwarted expectations. This makes Beth weary, unable to make sense of them, since language has become useless: "That was painful, and the only way out of the boredom was to bring home videos and put them on. Then everyone could put their heads back and sleep or pretend to sleep" (42-43). A simulacrum of agreement and social harmony, this strategy implies the acceptance of difference: whereas Beth was outraged at the thought of the two mothers at the beginning of the story, she negotiates peacefulness around them. Closing eyes refers, once again, to a framing device, which, far from ignoring what is to be seen, consists in acknowledging its existence. She is resorting to an Indian way of behaving this time, favoring harmony over conflict, even if she resists it most of the time.

18 After the birth of the baby, the young mother finally comes to terms with the "bizarre" feeling of giving up her motherhood for a sister: "What could have made her do that?" (47). Located at the very end of the story, after she has become a mother herself, the question is not addressed to anyone and it symbolizes her own, intimate bewilderment. Meeting with the object of the representation which had elicited such a desire to "find out for [herself]" (36) conveys a confidence which dispenses with clear-cut answers. From awkwardness to plain hostility and provisional harmony, the relationship escalates toward the much-awaited narrative moment when the snapshot took place. One day as she returns home after one of her flights from the sisters, Beth enters the house, and she sneaks up on them as they are intently looking at the snow falling for the first time in their life: "their white cotton saris were wrapped about them like shawls, their two heads leaned against each other as they peered out, speechlessly" (45). The story has come full circle: the photograph of the incipit lies there *in potentia*. Desai describes this scene as *kairos*: she "fetched the camera" and "took the photograph" (45). The composition conjures up an enlightening quality which lies beyond words:

> Beth wanted to tell them [...] it was their postures that expressed everything, but then they would have wanted to know what 'everything' was, and she found she did not want to explain, she did not want words to break the silent completeness of that small, still scene. It was as complete, and as fragile, after all, as a snow crystal (44).

19 The photograph as *kairos* endows time with a qualitative character: it "points to [the] significance [of events] and purpose and to the idea that there are constellations of events pregnant with a possibility not to be met at other times and under different circumstances" (Smith 47). The photograph is the epiphany of the protagonist's quest. She finally manages to "grasp" her own place within a lineage that extends far and deep. Snow, being a symbolically loaded image in Northern America, and more particularly Canada, is also a trope of the European literary canon, which postcolonial literature and criticism have for long doomed as a symbol of literary imperialism.[8] On the contrary, with "Winterscape," Desai reroutes the snow imagery and turns it into a frame for intercultural representation, by celebrating the vital element contained in that trace. Far from constructing a shrine to departed loved ones, the story, via the photograph, inscribes their presence into the Canadian soil and makes sense of their lives by highlighting their actual fecundity. The short story grasps what is "intuitive, fragile, ambiguous," because it conveys "the extraordinary complexity and the extraordinary multiplicity of the world we inhabit" (Glissant 24).[9] Following Glissant's meditation on the notion of trace, the short story, by using trace as its guide, aims at approaching truth despite its volatile, transitory state: the apparent invisibility of the

women on the snow paradoxically establishes their visibility in the eyes of the Canadian character. “One does not follow a trace in a desire to find out comfortable paths; its destiny is bound to truth, and it aims at exploding and disintegrating the seductive norm” (Glissant, 69-70).[10]

20 Read as the tale of a modern pilgrimage, “Winterscape” illuminates the profound changes brought about by a temporary visit, by evading the restricting scope of cultural manifestations of difference and belonging. In fact, the story resists the various categories that contemporary literary criticism has to offer: contrary to the contention of Françoise Kral according to which “[d]iasporic texts are by their very nature tales of nostalgia whose function is to remember the fragments of the motherland in a situation of either temporary displacement or permanent exile” (7), this essay has shown how Anita Desai moved away from nostalgia for the motherland and created a poetics of the present time without nostalgic lenses. The text does not marvel at the joys of contemporary hybridity either, and stays away from totalizing closure. “Winterscape” opens up a temporary pause, a transitory moment of equilibrium, which articulates an acute awareness of the distance between individuals and of their incommensurability. By playing on the presence/absence of language as well as its performative power, Desai also reaffirms the intimate bond between experience and storytelling. Thus she manages, as only great writers do, according to Edward Said, to provoke “readers into an awareness of how language is about experience and not just about itself” (Said xv).

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NOTES

1. "According to Hindu belief, the traversing of large expanses of water was associated with contamination and cultural defilement as it led to the dispersal of tradition, family, class and caste classifications and to the general loss of a 'purified' Hindu essence" (Mehta 5).

2. V.S. Naipaul's seminal novel, *The Mimic Men* (1967), where a West Indian character struggles in London, had a significant impact on postcolonial literature. Among Indian writers or writers of Indian origins addressing issues of displacement and tension between India and the West, one can mention Bharati Mukherjee, or more recently Kiran Desai, with *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006). Short story writers have also widely dwelled on that theme, like Salman Rushdie, in *East, West* (1994), or Jumpa Lahiri in *The Interpreter of Maladies* (1999).

3. I have translated from the French : "C'est le fait du narrateur né que de débarrasser une histoire de toute explication [...]. L'extraordinaire, le merveilleux, on le raconte avec la plus grande précision, mais on n'impose pas au lecteur l'enchaînement psychologique des événements."

4. Bharati Mukherjee's "A Wife's Story" is a good case in point. This short story also dwells on the visit of a husband to his wife who settled in New York City to pursue her Ph.D. The narrative focuses on the displaced Indian woman who copes with cultural adjustment and estrangement from her husband, but it almost ignores how the diasporic presence is affecting the host country.

5. Vaidyanathan poses that Indians think of themselves as "dividuals" rather than "individuals": "The Indian is not so much an individual in the accepted Western sense [...]. An Indian thinks of himself as being a father, a son, a nephew, a pupil, and these are the only 'identities' he ever has. An identity outside these relationships is almost inconceivable to him." (150-151)

6. Ashcroft interestingly argues for the irrelevance and narrowness of the term "diasporic" writing as he points to the rapid changes affecting the conditions of contemporary migrations (see pages 74-75).

7. I have translated from the French : "Ce que le narrateur raconte, il le tient de l'expérience, de la sienne propre ou d'une expérience communiquée. Et à son tour, il en fait l'expérience de ceux qui écoutent son histoire."

8. As a case in point, a number of postcolonial writers, such as Jamaica Kincaid in her novel *Lucy*, have taken to task the literary imagery of the European canon, abounding with references to snow and to daffodils for instance, which was imposed on West Indians at school.

9. I have translated from the French: "[Un non-système de pensée] intuitif, fragile, ambigu, qui conviendra mieux à l'extraordinaire complexité et à l'extraordinaire multiplicité du monde dans lequel nous vivons."

10. I have translated from the French: "On ne suit pas la trace pour déboucher dans les confortables chemins, elle voue à sa vérité qui est d'exploser, de déliter en tout la norme séductrice."

ABSTRACTS

Dans “Winterscape” (2000), Anita Desai met en scène le court séjour à Toronto de deux sœurs indiennes, veuves, venues rendre visite à leur fils et neveu à l’occasion de la naissance de son propre fils. Le titre de la nouvelle fait référence à leur photographie prise lors de leur séjour, alors que, elles-mêmes vêtues de blanc, elles contemplaient l’hiver canadien. Cet article vise à montrer comment ce moment paradigmatique du monde contemporain, marqué par les circulations et les migrations, concentre la difficulté fondamentale qui réside dans l’échange des regards, de l’expérience, de l’histoire, et dans la traduction de ces différences. En recourant à cette image qui fixe la présence de l’Inde sur le sol canadien, la nouvelle impose un moment de suspens qui permet de fabriquer un imaginaire transnational où peut s’élaborer un récit commun.

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