



An Analysis of Baumgartner's Bombay by  
Anita Desai and The Inheritance of Loss by  
Kiran Desai In the Light of Transnationalism,  
Othering and Cosmopolitanism

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## Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Chapter 1: Transnationalism and Cosmopolitanism.....	5
Chapter 2: Transcending Borders.....	9
Chapter 3: The Identity of the Other.....	13
Chapter 4: Engaging With the Other.....	20
Conclusion.....	24
Works Cited.....	26

## Introduction

“It is astonishing that now a whole generation has grown up reading Indian literature in English. [...] We read no Indian writers at all” (*In Conversation*). By saying this, Anita Desai implies an additional formation of writers and writing, complementing Western literature that has dominated readers’ focus for a long time. Nowadays, literary readers’ perception has reached beyond its Western confinements and is expanding towards Eastern literature as well, which includes Indian literature. This movement in literary focus can be seen as part of world literature, a concept emanating from the theory of Welt Literatur, coined by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. In the introduction to his book *What is World Literature*, David Damrosch gives his explanation of world literature:

[World Literature encompasses] all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin [...] In its most expansive sense, world literature could include any work that has ever reached beyond its home base [...] a work only has an [effective] life as world literature, whenever, and wherever, it is actively present within a literary system beyond that of its original culture. (4)

Thus, according to Damrosch, Indian literature read by readers outside of India could be seen as part of world literature since it actively circulates beyond its culture of origin.

Anita Desai, as well as her daughter Kiran Desai, are both writers that are part of this segment of world literature. Anita Desai was born in Delhi, in 1935, to a German mother and a Bengali father. She grew up in India, married at the age of twenty-one and raised four children, one of them being Kiran. However, she has said that she grew up surrounded by Western literature and music, whilst living in an Eastern culture and speaking Bengali, Urdu and Hindi too. During her lifetime, Anita moved to many countries, including America, where she was employed as a teacher for some years (Ostberg). Kiran Desai was born in

New-Delhi in 1971. She lived in India for fourteen years, after which she and her family moved, first to England and later on to the United States (Luebering). In this way, both writers are rooted in India. However, both have ventured beyond these boundaries, not only physically but also in their upbringing since it was interlaced with western influences. As a result, they are transnational writers who have moved across nations. This aspect is mirrored in the works of both authors, something Kiran Desai reflects upon in her interview with her mother, Anita:

Kiran: ‘You’ve been working on things I have been struggling with, switching between historical times, different points of view, different geographies.’ Anita: ‘It’s like having a jigsaw puzzle and having to see how to put the pieces together. [...] I inherited a fragmented world, you had a whole one that fragmented when you were [fourteen] and we left India for England and then the United States, and you’ve had to find a way to fit it together [...].’ (*In Conversation*)

According to Anita, both she and Kiran live in fragmented worlds. This and the fact that they are genetically related makes the comparison of their literary works extremely interesting and compelling. This study will compare Anita Desai’s novel *Baumgartner’s Bombay* (1987) to Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006). The first section of this paper will consist of a discussion, comparison and explanation of the two most important concepts in this study, namely cosmopolitanism and transnationalism. Transnationalism can be closely connected to the aforementioned jigsaw puzzle of Kiran Desai: it is the result of a connection across borders. With the crossing of borders, other cultures become significant and that is where cosmopolitanism becomes relevant, it being an orientation or engagement with the Other. The second part of this paper will be the actual comparison between both novels. This comparison will focus on: the kinds of transnationalism in the novels; the kinds

of 'othering' that are portrayed in relation to the establishment of identity; and the notion of cosmopolitanism in relation to both novels. *Baumgartner's Bombay* and *The Inheritance of Loss* have similarities on the level of content and stylistic elements: both novels are instances of literary transnationalism; both novels portray Othering and cosmopolitanism; and both novels include a large sense of perception, allowing the reader to experience transnationalism rather than just read about it. Yet, both novels also portray differences in their subjects and the way the stories are constructed, which can be attributed to the history of the writers and the time of writing.

## Transnationalism and Cosmopolitanism

As mentioned in the introduction, two concepts that could be closely associated with Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* are cosmopolitanism and transnationalism. However, these concepts are not of a straightforward nature. There is no single definition for either of the two notions and, bearing this in mind, it is important to look at the discussions connected to both. In doing so, a conscientious connection can be made between the aforementioned novels and the concepts of cosmopolitanism and transnationalism.

Cosmopolitanism is a concept and term that has existed for a long time. The Cynic Diogenes was the first person recorded to have referred to cosmopolitanism. When asked where he came from, Diogenes replied by saying that he was a citizen of the world [*kosmopolitês*] (Ashcroft 64). In other words, he did not see himself as belonging to a single nation or group. He saw himself as belonging to the cosmos. This led to Stoic cosmopolitanism, which had a great influence in the Greco-Roman world (Ashcroft 64). Thereafter, the definition of cosmopolitanism began to evolve. In the broadest sense, cosmopolitanism could be described as “a way of being in the world beyond the confines of nation and nationality” (Ashcroft 66). Kwame Anthony Appiah translates this to openness to people and cultures beyond the ones that we are raised in: to see people as fellows, even though you are not from the same country (*Cosmopolitanism*). Pnina Werbner gives a similar definition when she explains cosmopolitanism to be “empathy, toleration and respect for other cultures and values” (*Towards a New Cosmopolitanism*). Martha Nussbaum relates to Ashcroft's description when she states that a cosmopolitan is a person whose primary allegiance is to the community of human beings in the entire world (*Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism* 155). These four definitions come down to somewhat the same idea:

Diogenes' idea of being part of a larger community that spans the world and not just one nation. However, as Appiah aptly notices, there is no cosmopolis in the sense of one single world government (*Cosmopolitanism*). In other words, we are by definition part of smaller nations and nationalities. Cosmopolitanism is thus frequently disrupted by nationalism or war (*Towards a New Cosmopolitanism*). Since there is not one state, people consequently differ from each other. However, this is not unfavourable. Everyone should preserve their own heritage in a cosmopolitan community. As Werbner argues, we have to consider "the possibility of a borderless world of cultural diversity" (*Towards a New Cosmopolitanism*). Appiah agrees by stating that the local should not be abandoned (*Cosmopolitanism*) and Nussbaum mentions that one should not give up on local identifications (157). This is also where the difficulty with cosmopolitanism arises. People should get to know different cultures, yet, not everyone has the means to travel and experience these cultures. Appiah states that we should learn about other ways of life, not just by way of traveling, but through anthropology and history, novels, movies, news etc. (*Cosmopolitanism*). Nussbaum even introduces the term cosmopolitan education with which she implies a form of education that does not just make students aware that other cultures exist, but which also teaches students the values of these cultures (155-158). What, then, is the need for this cosmopolitanism? The longest lasting idea was Immanuel Kant's. He thought of cosmopolitanism as the policy that would ensure peace (Ashcroft 64). Appiah agrees with him (*Cosmopolitanism*). Nussbaum adds to this that through cosmopolitanism we would learn more about ourselves (158).

When looking at the discussion surrounding cosmopolitanism, it is understandable that different kinds of cosmopolitanism exist. Werbner mentions rooted, vernacular and elite cosmopolitanism (*Towards a New Cosmopolitanism*). In other words, there is no clear, unified definition. Yet, for the clarity of this paper, one definition will be used as a guideline.



This is the explanation given by Anjali Gera Roy which defines cosmopolitanism as: “an orientation, a willingness to engage with the other” (33).

A term that might well be connected to cosmopolitanism and which has helped transnationalism is globalisation. M. Kearny explained globalisation as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (548). In other words, a connection that crosses borders of nations. Whereas Kearny limits the definition to social relations, Simon Reich looks closer into the components which make up these social relations and states that all explanations of globalisation “recognize the interplay among economics, politics, and culture” (22). Thus, globalisation is not a process that is driven by just one force, but by many. Transnationalism is defined by Schiller et al. as “a social process in which migrants establish social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders” (ix). In a different definition, Steven Vertovec does not include the immigrant as a constituent part of transnationalism and states that transnationalism can be seen as multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states (447). Transnationalism is quite a novel term and it has to be distinguished from globalisation and immigration. It implies an involvement in both home and host society (Schiller ix). However, this involvement has to be of a certain intensity and simultaneity (Vertovec 448). As Portes et al. put it: “a high intensity of exchanges and a multiplication of activities” (219). This frequent contact, physical or not, could also be seen as a reason why transnationalism is such a novel term. New technologies serve to connect people easily, despite great distances, but these technologies were absent in the past, making transnationalism a difficult situation to obtain (Vertovec 447). However, what is less obvious in the previously given explanations of transnationalism is the notion of going beyond a

national identity. Kearny touches upon this issue when stating that “transnational processes are anchored in and transcend one or more nation-states” (548). Elaborating on this explanation, transnationalism could be seen as a third space which emerges when borders are crossed. This third space is created, transcending the different nations, yet arising from different parts of those nations and their connections. The notion of transnationalism discussed previously is focused mainly on physical transnationalism. Applying this concept to literature would provide one with literary transnationalism, a term that could be seen as a literary reflection upon moving across countries.

When comparing transnationalism and cosmopolitanism, a clear distinction must be made. Both isms involve a movement across countries and cultures. However, cosmopolitanism has, unlike transnationalism, a strong normative quality. It focusses on openness and orientation towards others with a higher purpose in mind. Transnationalism, on the other hand, is more value-neutral since it solely concerns a single person and not the actions or judgements between people.

### Transcending Borders

The first concept to be discussed in relation to Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, is transnationalism: a new sphere which emerges after countries and cultures have been crossed. This space contains elements of the aforementioned countries and cultures and can account for the action of the individual to which it belongs.

*Baumgartner's Bombay* is straightforward in the sense that it provides the reader with the story of a single character: Hugo Baumgartner. Baumgartner is a Jew who is forced to flee Germany to escape the Holocaust. He moves, via Venice, to India, first arriving in Bombay, then moving to Calcutta and finally moving back to Bombay. According to Isabelle Hesse, Baumgartner is not able to belong in any of those places, as she discusses "Baumgartner's alienation in Germany and his inability to belong in India" (887). This is not entirely true. Although Baumgartner is perceived as the other throughout the novel, he is committed to creating a home in India: "It seemed desperately important to belong and make a place for himself" (Desai Anita, 93). Bhawana Jain mentions this as well as "his only possibility of survival is to accept India [...] as his home" (6). Whereas Hesse portrays Baumgartner failing in finding a home in India, the story itself presents a moment where Baumgartner does feel a native of the land: "[...] all Europeanisms that he had forgotten, now brought back. [...] It made him realise how much of a native he had become. Baumgartner, a native of Hindustan" (Desai Anita 180 – 181). Baumgartner's transnationalism as a third and separate space becomes clear when he is in Venice: "Venice was the East and yet it was Europe too; it was that magic boundary where the two met and blended, and for those seven days Hugo had been a part of their union. [...] that bewitched point where they became one land of which he felt himself the natural citizen" (Desai Anita

63). Venice as the combination of home and host country, of the West and the East, fits Baumgartner. Baumgartner is not physically able to travel to the Germany that makes up his transnationalism. It is accessed by Baumgartner through the letters he receives from his mother (Hesse 885). The feeling of Baumgartner's transnationalism is brought to the reader as well. Anita Desai does this first of all through the language that is used. Whereas the larger part of the novel is written in English, there are also parts where German or Indian is used. Axel Stähler explains this use of German words as Desai's way of stimulating the reader's imagination (82). The German nursery rhymes are, for example, used throughout the novel, according to Stähler, to evoke the Holocaust (79). Although the Holocaust is a very specific example, the nursery rhymes do evoke a sense of Germanness. Similarly, the use of Indian words such as "chai, khana" etc. (Desai Anita 92) gives the reader a perception of Baumgartner's limited knowledge of the Indian language, yet also of his process of adapting to India (da Silva 71). Another example of Baumgartner's transnationalism is the time when he is confined to the camp in India. He sees an unknown woman who reminds him of Germany (Hesse 889-890): "He had not known women like her in Germany, [...] and yet she seemed to embody his German childhood" (Desai Anita 127). The reader experiences Baumgartner's imagination creating Germany. The term literary transnationalism is apt here since Desai provides the reader with a reflection upon Baumgartner's journey between countries and a sense of his transnationalism through the use of language and imagination.

Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* is a more complex story which interweaves many examples of transnationalism. To begin with, it features "various forms of border crossing" (Masterson 418). The judge Jemubhai Patel travelled to England for his education and is now living in Kalimpong. He is tensely trying to preserve his English manners:

“Never ever was the tea served the way it should be, but he demanded at least a cake or scones, macaroons or cheese straws. [...] This was a travesty and it undid the very concept of teatime” (Desai Kiran 3). The reader perceives this desire for Englishness mainly through his aversion for India. He is, for example, ashamed of his uneducated family: “Jemubhai looked at his father, a barely educated man venturing where he should not be, and the love in Jemubhai’s heart mingled with pity, the pity with shame” (Desai Kiran 37). What is more, the reader senses his intense shame due to not being entirely English: “[...] his English still had the rhythm and the form of Gujarati. [...] When he looked up, he saw they were all chuckling. [...] The judge shook himself. ‘Damn fool,’ he said out loud, [...] brought his fork and knife down in devastating judgment upon himself [...]” (Desai Kiran 112-113). Thus, Jemubhai Patel is an example of deliberate transnationalism. Sai is Judge Jemubhai Patel’s niece. Although she is the same “estranged Indian living in India,” she is not aware of her Englishness since she was brought up in a convent that way (Desai Kiran 210). The reader perceives her Englishness as ordinary, since Sai only notices it to be divergent when she compares herself to Gyan, who resembles the Indian lower class: “But during the time they ate together at Gompu’s, Gyan had used his hands without a thought and Sai ate with the only implement on the table. [...] Noticing the difference, they had become embarrassed and put the observation aside” (Desai Kiran 140). Finally, there’s also the case of Biju, who has moved to the USA to find work. Biju is, other than the judge, trying to keep close to his home-country India. The reader experiences this through a mounting feeling of frustration since Biju is not accepted as Indian (Desai Kiran 77). This results in him deciding only to accept work that caters to his culture: “One should not give up one’s religion, the principles of one’s parents and their parents before them. No, no matter what” (Desai Kiran 136). Biju is thus an example of transnationalism where borders are crossed but where the home

country is preferred. Kiran has woven the American aspect of Biju's transnationalism into the story through the perspective of his father, the Cook, who boasts about Biju living in America: "My son works in New York,' the cook boasted to everyone he met" (Desai Kiran 84). In other words, however short and fragmentary the previous descriptions of transnational characters in *The Inheritance of Loss* might be due to a limited word-count, it becomes clear that Kiran Desai offers the reader a multitude of cross-ethnic, diasporic experiences (Sabo 1). In doing so, the novel "[compels readers] to make transnational connections" (Sabo 3). This kind of writing connects seamlessly to the concept of literary transnationalism. However, when looking at the previously given description of transnationalism, the judge and Sai might be seen as more fitting to that description than Biju, since the latter is trying very hard to keep the culture of his home country alive.

When comparing both novels in the light of transnationalism, a remark could be made about the kinds of diaspora and immigration portrayed in the novels. They differ as a result of the history of the writers. Anita Desai can be connected to the Jewish diaspora in her novel through her mother, who was a German. Kiran Desai can be connected to her novel in the following way:

Kiran Desai's own sense of being a South Asian writer living in the diaspora, emotionally indebted to both India and the United States, helps us understand her struggle with the overall structure of *The Inheritance of Loss* [...] Desai herself recognizes what she calls a loss of "a vision of wholeness" inherent in her own diasporic journey from India to England and the USA. (Sabo 7)

Thus, Kiran's own history can be seen as a reason for the structure of her novel. However, both novels are equal in the way that they offer a reflection upon connections across countries, which makes them instances of literary transnationalism.

## The Identity of the Other

Looking at transnationalism and thinking of the corresponding movement across borders and cultures, the pertinence of identity and associations with the Other is quite significant. When arriving in a different nation or culture, an encounter with the Other is probable whilst being the Other at the same time. The notion of identity then is something fluid to be established anew.

According to Mary K. Canales, the Other is those we see as different from the Self. Consequently, the act of Othering involves an engagement with the Other. It is noticeable that this engagement can be positive as well as negative. Consequently, Canales divides Othering into two separate concepts: exclusionary Othering and Inclusionary Othering. Looking at those names it is not difficult to imagine that exclusionary Othering implies the use of power within the previously mentioned involvement for domination and subordination. Likewise, inclusionary Othering means using that power for transformation and integration. In other words, when applying the description given by Canales, Othering is simply the engagement with someone who is perceived as different from the Self. However, this engagement can be an act of separation or one of incorporation.

When comparing Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* with Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, the identity of the characters is partly created through the process of Othering, inclusionary as well as exclusionary. However, when looking at exclusionary Othering, a difference can be noticed. Whereas in *Baumgartner's Bombay* Othering is based mainly on religion and exterior appearance, in *The Inheritance of Loss* the main reasons for Othering are culture, class and race.

In *Baumgartner's Bombay* the main object of transnationalism and the Othering process is Hugo Baumgartner. However, what is remarkable is that Baumgartner is not only

the Other in his host country India, but also in his home country, Germany. As Sapan Narzary puts it, Baumgartner belongs to neither India nor the West (157). Tony Simoes da Silva picks up on this as well and connects it to a sense of alienation and fragmentation (65). It is exactly this missing of belonging somewhere that shapes Baumgartner's identity. The main reason for Baumgartner's Othering is his religion, his Jewishness. Corinne Demass Bliss notices this as well, since she mentions that Anita Desai has used Baumgartner's Jewishness as a reason for his discrimination (522). First of all, Baumgartner is Othered in his homeland, Germany, for being Jewish in the course of Hitler's reign. This is clear when Herr Pfuehl tries to persuade Baumgartner to leave Germany: "Yes, he wanted them out [...] He was worried. He was afraid of being accused of harbouring Jews when Hitler was trying to rid the sacred fatherland of them [...]" (Desai Anita 54). However, Baumgartner's persecution does not remain within the borders of Germany. In India, Baumgartner is sent to a camp because of his religion: "In the police station a man [...] apologized, 'I have to arrest you sir. War is declared and we must take you into detention camp'" (Desai Anita 103). Connected to his religion and descent are Baumgartner's exterior features, which are also a reason for his Othering. Whereas in India he is the foreigner for being too white, in Germany he is so for being too dark skinned: "In Germany he had been too dark – his darkness had marked him the Jew, *der Jude*. In India he was fair – and that marked him the *firanghi*. In both lands, the unacceptable" (Desai Anita 20). Baumgartner's alienation can not just be read but also sensed throughout the novel. Da Silva states that "India's chaos and disorder can be seen as objective correlatives for the despair and hopelessness in Baumgartner's life" (65). It is true that Baumgartner's surroundings in India create the feeling of alienation, of being ill at ease. For example, when he walks past a homeless family outside his apartment: "[...] he never walked past them, never turned his back without feeling the hairs



on the back of his neck rise, a brief prickle of – not exactly fear, but unease, an apprehension” (Desai Anita 7). This homeless family is part of the Bombay–scenery and evokes an uneasy feeling in Baumgartner and thus in the reader, connecting that same feeling to Bombay itself. The sense of entrapment is evoked when Baumgartner describes the Colaba streets with a simile: “How did one escape, caught in the traffic like a fish in a net teeming with a million other fish? So much naked skin, oiled and slithering with perspiration, the piscine bulge and stare of so many eyes” (Desai Anita 18). This simile clearly resembles a situation many people would rather escape than be in with the wetness of sweat and the dead stare of fishy eyes. The sense of alienation is evoked furthermore by making Baumgartner stand out. This happens from a young age onwards: “It was in this school for Jewish children, oddly enough, that Hugo first had a remark directed at his nose. [...] he heard around him a chant that came from all the children as they jumped, hopped and clapped their hands to keep warm: ‘*Baumgartner, Baum, hat ein Nase wie ein Daum!*’” (Desai Anita 37-38). Many will know the terrible feeling of being bullied as a child and that is exactly the feeling evoked. Similarly, in detention camp he is the one who just obeys whereas the others are protesting against their captors: “Baumgartner was willing to go along with all these absurdities in the resigned, half-hearted way taught him by years of helpless submission to bullying, first in Germany, then in the camp, which was an extension of the former” (Desai Anita 116). By comparing the camp to his school, the same sense of being different is evoked. Finally, Desai also uses language to create the feeling of being different, for example by having characters, including Baumgartner himself, refer to Baumgartner as stupid throughout the novel: “[...] Baumgartner, *du Dummkopf*” (Desai Anita 6).

It is the connection with the Other, rather than the separation from it, that shapes

Baumgartner's identity as well. An example of inclusionary Othering in *Baumgartner's Bombay* is the friendship between Baumgartner and the Indian Chimanlal. That this friendship is genuine, rather than based on money or status, becomes evident from Baumgartner's thoughts on the matter: "Baumgartner could not discover why he took up a homeless foreigner, not even one with the prestige of having been an erstwhile ruler, a part of the colonial might and power, but simply a stray, a pariah in the eyes of the raj, clearly the most powerless of all" (Desai Anita 183). There is also the character of Lotte who is, just like Baumgartner, a foreigner in India and through this mutual foreignness, a connection is established: "'Here, someone from your own country.' [...] In those raw, sore rings of her neck, so like his own, he saw their kinship" (Desai Anita 95). It is with Lotte, because of their similar identities, that Baumgartner feels at ease. This sense of fitting together is visually described by Desai when Baumgartner and Lotte sleep together: "With small groans they made themselves comfortable against each other, finding concavities into which to press their convexities, and convexities into which to fit concavities, till at last they made one comfortable whole, two halves of a large misshapen bag of flesh" (Desai Anita 82). They fill in each other until they form a comfortable unity.

*The Inheritance of Loss* tells a more complex story which interweaves multiple instances of Othering. According to Mane et al., people are treated differently based on culture, race and class (2). These are indeed the main reasons for exclusionary Othering in the novel. Concerning culture, the Judge is an example. He favours an English way of living and therefore he does not fit in the Indian culture (Mane 3). The Judge notices this when he returns from England: "He was a foreigner" (Desai Kiran 166-167). Kiran Desai paints this alienation sharply in a scene where his wife steals his powder puff. He tries to explain to his family this concept of powder puff, which might well represent the larger whole of his

English manners:

‘But what is missing?’ ‘My puff.’ ‘What is that?’ He tried to explain. [...] But, ‘Ha ha,’ laughed a sister [...] ‘we sent you abroad to become a gentleman, and instead you have become a lady!’ [...] They all said *powder puff* in English, for, naturally, there was no Gujarati word for this invention. Their very accents rankled the judge. [...] His mother questioned the naughtiest cousins. [...] And the entire embarrassment of explaining had to be gone through again. (Desai Kiran 167 – 168)

This passage conveys a sense of embarrassment and irritation which are results of the judge’s alienation from the rest of his family due to his want of what he perceives as Englishness. In the eyes of his family, however, he has not just been abroad but he has changed his entire gender. Whereas this would not be such an issue in many contemporary European countries, it is in the India of the judge. What’s more, similar to Baumgartner in *Baumgartner’s Bombay*, the judge lives a secluded life away from others, which evokes the sense of estrangement: “The judge could live here, in this shell, this skull, with the solace of being a foreigner in his own country [...]” (Desai Kiran 29). By using the metaphor of a shell and a skull for the judge’s home, Desai creates the feeling that the judge seeks protection from the outside world. He is hiding from a place he does not fit in. As for exclusionary Othering through class, there is the relation between Sai and Gyan. Sai and Gyan are experiencing friction due to the differences in class (Ghorpade 3): “But during the time they ate together at Gompu’s, Gyan had used his hands without a thought and Sai ate with the only implement on the table – a tablespoon [...] Noticing this difference, they had become embarrassed” (Desai Kiran 140). Sai is, throughout the beginning of the novel, quite unaware of the Other class. She lives with the judge, who is similar to her (Desai Kiran 210). Kiran Desai writes towards a climax in which Sai has the epiphany of the Other. This

climax occurs when she visits Gyan's home:

'Do you know where Gyan lives?' Sai asked. She pointed at a house just ahead; there it stood and Sai felt a moment of shock. [...] just the kind of thing that Lola and Noni made merciless fun of. [...] Sai felt shame, then, for him. [...] Of course he had kept her far away. [...] And she felt distaste, then, for herself." (Desai Kiran 255–256)

During this epiphany, Sai sees herself opposed to Gyan and thus constructs a part of her identity as the Other. Since Gyan is the one whom she has made fun of, she feels shame for him. The judge is an example of exclusionary Othering through race. He experiences this first when he tries to find a place to stay in England: "While he was unimpressed, though, so too were the people who answered his knock, when they opened their doors to his face" (Desai Kiran 38). Desai paints this painful alienation due to race through the judge's solitary existence and insecurity whilst living in England:

But shadows, after all, create their own unease, and despite his attempts to hide, he merely emphasized something that unsettled others. For entire days nobody spoke to him at all, his throat jammed with words unuttered, his heart and mind turned into blunt aching things, and elderly ladies, even the hapless [...] moved over when he sat next to them in the bus [...]. Thus Jemubhai's mind had begun to warp; he grew stranger to himself than he was to those around him, found his own skin odd-colored, his own accent peculiar. [...] In fact, he could barely let any of himself peep out of his clothes for fear of giving offence. (Desai Kiran 39-40)

Desai creating a feeling of self-loathing gives the reader the sense of Jemubhai's alienation.

He turns into something scarcely human.

When looking at inclusionary Othering in the novel, the friendship between Biju and Saeed Saeed is a perfect example: "And Biju [...] met Saeed Saeed, who would become the

man he admired most in the United States of America. ‘I am from Zanzibar, not Tanzania,’ he said, introducing himself. Biju knew neither one nor the other” (Desai Kiran 53). As in the relationship between Lotte and Baumgartner in *Baumgartner’s Bombay*, Biju connects to someone who finds himself in a similar situation: being an illegal employee in the United States of America. Biju’s identity is outlined by this relationship since Saeed Saeed resembles him and at the same time embodies what Biju would like to be. The resemblance is painted by way of the situation in which they find themselves (Desai Kiran 95). The sense of Biju looking up to Saeed Saeed is evoked through Biju’s perception: “Saeed, he relished the whole game, the way the country flexed his wits and rewarded him; he charmed it, cajoled it, cheated it, felt great tenderness and loyalty toward it” (Desai Kiran 79).

When comparing the analyses of Anita Desai’s *Baumgartner’s Bombay* and Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* in the light of Othering and the concurring establishment of identity, many similarities can be noticed. Both inclusionary Othering and exclusionary Othering are used to establish the identity of characters throughout the novels. However, instead of being given flat descriptions of the characters, both writers include a lot of feeling in their painting of the characters through Otherness. By doing so, the reader is able to experience the process of Othering, rather than just read about it. The difference between both novels would be the disparate reasons for the Othering process. This difference, however, might be attributed to the differences in the forms of transnationalism portrayed in both novels.

### Engaging With the Other

You think the only people who are people,  
 are the people who look and think like you,  
 but if you walk the footsteps of a stranger,  
 you'll learn things you never knew [...].  
 For whether we are white or copper-skinned,  
 we just sing with all the voices of the mountain,  
 we just paint with all the colours of the wind. (*Pocahontas* 1995)

Cosmopolitanism in connection to literature can be viewed from more than one perspective. This can be seen when looking at cosmopolitan works of literature other than Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. Kazuo Ishiguro is a transnational writer with Japanese roots. Yet, he grew up in England. His novel *Artist of the Floating World* is a novel written in English but based in Japan. It views Japan through the memories and eyes of an old Japanese painter. By doing so, Ishiguro creates an emotive as well as an unreliable description of Japan. Even though the character might not be cosmopolitan in his actions, the novel itself is, since it immerses the reader in the Japan of one particular person. This could be seen as an orientation towards the Other. A completely different form of cosmopolitan literature is Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*. Whereas *Artist of the Floating World* focusses more on the world experienced through one character, *Sea of Poppies* tells the story of many different characters, thus creating a world consisting of multiple pieces as if it were a puzzle. Similarly to Ishiguro, Ghosh provides the reader with an opportunity of orientation towards the Other. However, Ghosh also creates another layer of cosmopolitanism by letting characters that differ largely from one another, engage with one another.

*Baumgartner's Bombay* resembles Ishiguro's *Artist of the Floating World* in the way that it is written in English, yet based in India and that it creates an affective image of India through the eyes of one narrator. Baumgartner is the Other in the novel (Narzary 157) and this creates multiple cosmopolitan perspectives. First of all, with Baumgartner being the Other, the Indian characters in the novel who do engage with him could be seen as cosmopolitan characters. Chimanlal is such a character: "Baumgartner had his doubts, his uncertainties, but Chimanlal never entertained any. Baumgartner could not discover why he took up a homeless foreigner" (Desai Anita 183). It is here that Baumgartner evokes the sense of him being the Other and Chimanlal being the one that initiates the contact between them. However, because this relationship is described through Baumgartner's perspective, a large sense of emotion is connected to the description: "It was with his only son [...] that Chimanlal became entirely human in Baumgartner's eyes – by which he meant vulnerable. [...] and invited him to join him in his one weakness, his sole vice, making Baumgartner feel as if he were peeling off layer after layer of a large and shining onion to arrive at its sweet yellow heart" (Desai Anita 192). By referring to Chimanlal as human, Desai creates the image of Baumgartner seeing Chimanlal no longer as the Other but as part of the same realm as himself. The metaphor of the onion connects a sense of warmth and love to Chimanlal's character. In doing so, Desai, in a way, shows the beauty of an engagement with the Other.

Another layer of cosmopolitanism is that, due to the fact that Baumgartner is the Other and the reader experiences the story through his eyes, the reader engages with him and thus with the Other in a very deep way. Desai creates the experience of Baumgartner's identity, or his alienation, through his perception of the world around him. For example when it is Christmas and he is too humble to accept the present he wants most: "And Hugo

could not move [...] for nothing, nothing would persuade him that the twinkling glass globe was his. [...] Then the agony was over and he could collapse into the dark ditch of his shame. [...] Was it just that he sensed he did not belong to the radiant, the triumphant of the world?" (Desai Anita 36). Here, the reader experiences the feelings of a child with such a sense of inferiority that he does not dare to accept a gift he really wants, together with the extreme feelings of powerlessness.

Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* shows more resemblance to Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*, since it evokes an image through multiple perspectives. This novel too shows cosmopolitanism on different levels. The novel creates the identity of India by means of its relation to other countries (Sabo 8). It tells multiple stories of migration, with the immigrants being portrayed as the Other. One example is the identity of India in relation to England through the character of the judge. India is contrasted to England with the implication that England is better than India. This is shown when the judge leaves on a boat to England: "Jemubhai looked at his father, a barely educated man venturing where he should not be, and the love in Jemubhai's heart mingled with pity, the pity with shame" (Desai Kiran 37). Jemubhai's father, representing the Indian class to which Jemubhai belongs, is shown as something to be ashamed of. As in *Baumgartner's Bombay*, there are feelings attached to the description of the Other. This feeling of England being better returns in the judge's manners: "Never ever was the tea served the way it should be, but he demanded at least a cake or scones [...]. Something sweet and something salty. This was a travesty and it undid the very concept of teatime" (Desai Kiran 3). Thus, the Other is established through its own perception of things and because of this perception the reader engages with it, similar to *Baumgartner's Bombay*. However, instead of just one perspective, Kiran Desai provides her readers with many perspectives. According to Sabo, Desai offers



readers an enlarged cosmopolitan perspective on historical interconnections (5). In other words, Desai shows that there are many instances of the Other and she provides the reader with an opportunity to engage with them all. It is exactly this textual disconnectedness that conveys the feeling of fragmentation inherent to the Otherness embodied by the characters (Sabo 2).

With the existence of the Other, the notion of cosmopolitanism comes into existence: cosmopolitanism being here the orientation towards or engagement with the Other. There are many instances of literary cosmopolitanism and the examples from *Baumgartner's Bombay* and *The Inheritance of Loss* are just a few of them. When comparing both novels, the main similarity is that both novels allow the reader to engage with the Other by telling the story through their perspective. They do not create a flat description of their lives and surroundings but one full of feelings. The main difference is that in *Baumgartner's Bombay* the reader gets one perspective and is therefore able to get a deeper understanding of that character whereas *The Inheritance of Loss* provides the reader with multiple points of view. This creates a rather chaotic image, perhaps reducing the reader's attachment to the characters.

### Conclusion.

Anita Desai and Kiran Desai are both transnational writers who have moved across nations. This combined with the fact that they are mother and daughter makes it extremely interesting to compare their works of literature. This study has done so by comparing Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. Consequently, transnationalism was a relevant point of comparison in both novels. When crossing borders, different cultures and the notion of the Other are inevitably encountered. Thus, Othering is closely linked to transnationalism. Hence, the notion of the Other in relation to identity was the second point of comparison. This, in turn, yielded the final point of comparison: cosmopolitanism is a concept that rests for a large part on the notion of the Other and was therefore a logical follow-up.

When looking back at the previously made comparisons between *Baumgartner's Bombay* and *The Inheritance of Loss*, similarities were mostly found on the level of content. Both novels were to be seen as instances of literary transnationalism, both portrayed inclusionary as well as exclusionary Othering and both novels portrayed cosmopolitanism in one way or the other. The smaller substantive differences could be attributed to the different histories of both writers. Anita Desai focusses clearly on the Holocaust and its Jewish subject who lives in India. This could be connected to her mother being German and thus herself being half German, half Indian. Kiran Desai tells the story of many different forms of transnationalism, yet also bases her novel in India, which could be attributed to her own past of being Indian but moving across many countries.

However, the most interesting remarks could be made about the stylistic elements, rather than content. Both authors have included a large sense of perception and feeling in their novels, which gives the reader the opportunity to experience rather than just read. The

main difference in this aspect is that Anita Desai has focused her story on a single character, which allows the reader a deeper and clearer connection with the main character. Kiran Desai, on the other hand, has built her story from many different pieces, thus creating an almost mosaic work of literature. Both authors write to put transnational pieces together, however, it is noticeable that perhaps Anita's puzzle is a more seamless unity than Kiran's work is. This is remarkable since one could assume that, with the passing of time, adaptation to the crossing of borders would become naturalised and perhaps less of a struggle. Nevertheless, in the case of Anita and Kiran, it seems that the generation gap could be a reason for their difference in success or failure in creating a unity out of the fragments of transnationalism.

This study revealed the many layers that were hidden in the narratives of *Baumgartner's Bombay* and *The Inheritance of Loss*. Perhaps more layers than would be expected at first. Where *The Inheritance of Loss* wears the cover of a love story, it turns out to be a complicated web of narratives and where *Baumgartner's Bombay* could be mistaken for the single tragic story of the Holocaust, it bears the larger story of a struggle for acceptance and identity. The limited amount of words that this study entails does, therefore, not do justice to the full complexity of both novels.

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