

The Collected Short Stories of Bharati Mukherjee, edited by Ruth Maxey. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2023, pp. 408.

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Bharati Mukherjee was the first South Asian American writer to receive widespread and literary acclaim in the United States, and her oeuvre has invited other authors of minority descent (significantly younger South Asian American women) to see themselves reflected on her pages but also to write their own stories. Despite her prolific literary oeuvre (two long anthologies of short stories, essays, reviews and eight novels), her stories had yet to be published as a whole. That is precisely why *The Collected Short Stories of Bharati Mukherjee* (2023), edited by Ruth Maxey, is so valuable. She is a well-known scholar of Mukherjee, as proven by her previous publication entitled *Understanding Bharati Mukherjee* (2019), awarded the Choice Outstanding Academic Title two years later in 2021, but also by some papers she has dedicated to Mukherjee. This book comprises a foreword by Nalini Iyer, an introduction by Ruth Maxey, and the stories, which the editor divides into early, midcareer and late stories. The book concludes with the foreword, authored by Lysley Tenorio.

The foreword, by Nalini Iyer, brings a personal touch to the book as the author recalls her first encounter with Bharati Mukherjee when she was still a student, but also how reading her made her understand her identity better. As occurs throughout the book, she reclaims the lost place of Bharati Mukherjee in the literary arena and comments that her oeuvre should not be overlooked. Her foreword is a positive appraisal of Ruth Maxey, the book's editor, implying her tenacity in recovering Mukherjee's stories and the value the book brings to teachers and professors, who undoubtedly will resort to this accessible volume in preparation for their own lessons.

The introduction, written by Ruth Maxey, offers us compelling reasons for grasping Bharati Mukherjee's importance as a pioneer and how her fiction has been undervalued despite that. The scholars interested in her, instead of looking at the wide range of stories, focused instead on *Jasmine*, by far the most research of her books. The editor critically remarks on how few other stories have been analysed against the continuous papers, which are all very much centred on *Jasmine*.

The author divides the introduction into three parts to outline the most relevant stages in her literature: first, she focuses on "Mukherjee's Early Short Fiction", where she delves into literary genealogies, how she has inspired future writers, but also how other authors have motivated her to write her fiction since she started writing in the Iowa Writers' Workshop, the reason why she emigrated to the United States in the 1960s. Much attention is given to the stories she wrote for her final dissertation in the MFA, as it is clear how much influence they had on her. Then, Ruth Maxey moves on to the second part, "Darkness and the Evolution of Mukherjee's Short Fiction". In it, it is considered how hard it was for Mukherjee to get her stories published, but equally how her style matured from "a young, inexperienced writer honing her literary techniques [...] to a new level of Chekhovian sophistication and assurance" (Maxey, 2023: xvii) in the 1970s.

It is fascinating how the editor goes through all of the stories written in *Darkness*, the anthology published in 1985, enabling the readers to scratch the surface of her literature slightly before delving into the stories later in the book. The next part of the introduction, entitled "Mukherjee's Critical Breakthrough: *The Middleman and Other Stories*", familiarises the reader with the following anthology published by Bharati Mukherjee in 1988, *The Middleman and Other Stories*, which was much more praised than the previous one. It won the National Books Critics' Circle Award for Fiction, the first time for a naturalised U.S. citizen. As it happens during the last section, Ruth Maxey also gives the reader some hints on the sort of stories found in this anthology. The conclusion continues Mukherjee's literary oeuvre past *The Middleman and Other Stories* and briefly explains the book's structure.

Even so, the conclusion continues because Ruth Maxey engages in direct conversation with the possible readers of *The Collected Short Stories of Bharati Mukherjee*. First, she addresses professors who could resort to this book in their courses, at university or elsewhere. For the editor, the book could be helpful for

those lecturing in various classes, including post-colonial literature, Asian American literature or even creative writing, among many others. For students, she outlines how the intertextuality in Mukherjee's fiction can offer endless possibilities for interpretive comparative analysis. Besides, those drawn by topics as diverse as colonialism, South Asia, race, sexuality, or gender will benefit from this publication. She closes the introduction not by limiting her readership but by widening it, including all of those she considers will profit from all the stories gathered in a single publication.

The core of the book is devoted to the stories, which Ruth Maxey breaks down in "Early Stories (1963-1966)", which comprises the tales in the anthology *The Shattered Mirror* (1963) and *Debate on a Rainy Afternoon* (1966). Then, she moves on to "Midcareer Stories (1985-1988)", the most extended section in the entire book devoted to the stories of *Darkness* (1985) and *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988), twenty-two in total. Finally, "Late Stories (1997-2012)", the section spanning more years and consecrated to six stories, less known than the others mentioned, which include *Happiness* (1997), *Homes* (2008), *A Summer Story* (c. 2008), and approximately the same time, *The House on Circular Street*, *The Laws of Chance* in 2011 and 2012, *The Going-Back Party*.

The book concludes with the afterword written by Lysley Tenorio, which follows the argumentative thread initiated by Ruth Maxey that Bharati Mukherjee's importance in the American literary scene is acknowledged after having been lost for some years now. The afterword beautifully closes the book as Lysley Tenorio relates his experience in class with Mukherjee, her professor in Berkeley. But his statement at the end is that her literature should be vindicated as she opened up the literary world for generations of immigrants to come by cheerfully asserting, "How lucky we are, then, to have them gathered in a single volume, to be with Mukherjee's characters, these vibrant, brilliant, foolish, gutsy, unforgettable individuals who cross over and say to the world, to themselves, I am here, yes, I am here" (Maxey, 2023: 369).

The Collected Short Stories of Bharati Mukherjee (2023), edited by Ruth Maxey, offers an undeniably great addition to scholars, students, or lay readers drawn to Bharati Mukherjee's formidable oeuvre. Not only is it the first work to collect all stories written by Mukherjee, but it also offers a very complete introduction to her. Many of her stories have remained out of print for some years, so to have them all available in such an easy and portable book might encourage scholars to delve into her literature past her best-known stories. This book is crucial to understanding Bharati Mukherjee; it is very well developed and commented on by Ruth Maxey, definitely one of the best scholars in Bharati Mukherjee these days; Nalini Iyer and Lysley Tenorio, whose knowledge of the author goes beyond the purely academic and enters into the realm of the personal.