

Emmanuel S. Nelson, ed. *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1993. pp. 236. \$38.00.

Bharati Mukherjee has firmly established herself as a significant transnational writer on the immigrant experience—a subject that is central to all postcolonial/Commonwealth literature. *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives* is not only a tribute to her rising stature in the academy but it also fills a need for those who have a scholarly interest in the area.

The volume contains 12 essays that cover—from a variety of cultural approaches ranging from cultural analysis to poststructuralist reading—various aspects of Mukherjee's fiction. Such a diversity of theoretical and interpretive strategies attempts to highlight what the editor correctly declares as the key purpose of this collection, namely, "to offer not only multiple but conflicting perspectives on Mukherjee's art and achievement" (x).

Most contributors agree that what distinguishes Mukherjee from other writers on the immigrant experience is not only her feminist stance, through which she sees the transformation of her oppressed Indian women immigrants into all-powerful Americans, but her attempt at examining the simultaneous transformation of North America as a consequence of immigration from Asia and Africa. This is what adds complexity to her work. However, the irony is that in this very strength lies the source of her weakness or, shall I say, ground for legitimate attack on her.

Alpana Sharma Knippling and Debjani Banerjee mount this attack in their brilliant essays entitled "Toward an Investigation of the Subaltern in Bharati Mukherjee's *The Middleman and Other Stories* and *Jasmine*" and "In the Presence of History: The Representation of Past and Present Indias in Bharati Mukherjee's Fiction." Both of these critics focus on the problem of representation in Mukherjee's work. While Knippling lauds Mukherjee's desire to challenge mainstream American literary-cultural productions, she establishes that Mukherjee is not that radical. Knippling does so by demonstrating that Mukherjee "ignores the role that representation (of the Other) plays in the production of her writing and, second, that she homogenizes her ethnic minority immigrant subjects" (144). Knippling quite correctly questions Mukherjee's credentials in representing the marginalized and voiceless subaltern characters, given Mukherjee's avowed social determinations as bourgeois intellectual—she herself alludes to her "Brahminical elegance" with pride. The question of privilege becomes important when Mukherjee claims to represent the underprivileged "Other."

In an equally convincing critique, Debjani Banerjee argues that Mukherjee's unambiguous linkage of her identity as an American writer denies her the strategic distance that is needed to comment on

and critique the dominant ideologies. Her valorization of the U.S. as a locus for positive change in novels like *Jasmine* problematizes her position as a postcolonial intellectual, for she fails to see the threat of American neocolonialism.

There are several other articles in this collection that are worth mentioning. Samir Dayal examines the pervasiveness of violence in Mukherjee's work, arguing that the ambivalent functionality of violence in *Jasmine* reveals "the contradictions of postcolonial subject-formation" (65). Janet M. Powers offers an interesting deconstructive reading of Mukherjee's fiction. Using Roland Barthes's system of structural analysis of narrative, Powers highlights the sociopolitical commentary generated in Mukherjee's novels of the Indian immigrant experience in the United States. Pushpa N. Parekh looks at the narrative voice and gender roles in *Jasmine*, focussing on how these techniques are used in delineating the "selving" process of the immigrant women. Gurleen Grewal investigates the many inconsistencies that plague *Jasmine*. She makes a convincing case of the utter improbability of Jasmine's adventures and changes of identities in the United States, showing Mukherjee's insensitivity to the real struggles of immigrant women. Mitali R. Pati examines the culture conflict that Mukherjee's Indian immigrants experience in her short stories. Carole Stone makes a comparative analysis of the short fiction of Bernard Malamud and Mukherjee. Maya Manju Sharma traces the development of Mukherjee as an artist, with focus on her early work. Pramila Venkateswaran examines Mukherjee as an autobiographer, arguing that *Days and Nights in Calcutta* marks the turning point in her artistic development.

*Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives* is a useful collection of essays with plenty of material that the reader will find interesting and challenging or, at the very least, controversial.

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Bruce Greenfield. *Narrating Discovery: The Romantic Explorer in American Literature, 1790-1855*. New York: Columbia UP, 1992. pp. x, 249.

Discovery narratives, so Bruce Greenfield in *Narrating Discovery*, are part of colonial discourse, for "reporting on an exploratory journey . . . meant casting individual activity in terms that would be recognized and valued in European and colonial power centres" (10). These introductory remarks are apropos; they are also somewhat alarming, because a reader versed in recent travel criticism may fear that this is yet another predictable and jargon-ridden tract without due attention to the texts. Such a reader will be pleasantly surprised: *Narrating Discovery* is one of the most intelligent and thought-provoking books in the field to have come along in recent years; in its unassuming way, it is equally respectful towards its material and its reader without ever relinquishing its own intellectual integrity.