



# Interpreter of Maladies

*Jhumpa Lahiri*

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## Interpreter of Maladies Jhumpa Lahiri

Navigating between the Indian traditions they've inherited and the baffling new world, the characters in Jhumpa Lahiri's elegant, touching stories seek love beyond the barriers of culture and generations. In "A Temporary Matter," published in *The New Yorker*, a young Indian-American couple faces the heartbreak of a stillborn birth while their Boston neighborhood copes with a nightly blackout. In the title story, an interpreter guides an American family through the India of their ancestors and hears an astonishing confession. Lahiri writes with deft cultural insight reminiscent of Anita Desai and a nuanced depth that recalls Mavis Gallant.

## Interpreter of Maladies Details

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Author : Jhumpa Lahiri

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## From Reader Review Interpreter of Maladies for online ebook

### Kavitha says

Once again, a very depressing storyline from yet another author of Indian origin. Remember! I am not being parochial here, I am Indian myself. Being very familiar with Indian cinematography and screenplays, I know that Indians are prone to over emphasizing on family sentiments and emotions. But what I fail to understand is how authors based out of other countries too have the same idea of applying sentiments in a very negative sense to their stories. It also beats me how this won the Pulitzer, just the same way it does to think that God of Small Things won the Booker!

But to Lahiri's credit, her prose is very simplistic and is a pleasure to read, contrary to Roy's. Also, Lahiri's vivid descriptions of life of immigrants in the US is very realistic. But again, I am not sure if I should be giving her too much credit in this regard. She is based out of US and she knows the nuances of life in US (the peanut butter and jelly combination etc.). So, that probably never involved too much research. Real credit goes to authors who write about lifestyles that they are totally unfamiliar with. Take Yann Martel (Yes! He is one of my favorite authors!) for example, his description of life in India in his award winning book, *Life Of Pi*, is commendable. Unfamiliar with India as he was, he sure did his homework before he wrote the book.

I am currently reading *The Namesake* by Lahiri to see if I can change my opinion on her writings. After all, reading one book isn't always enough to rate an author who has worked so hard on writing full fledged books!

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### Nataliya says

Writing short stories is not easy. A novel is an easier literary form in a way - it allows you the space for character and plot development and gives you the space to slowly fall in love with it.

**Short story, on the other hand, is like literary speed dating;** it only has so much time to set itself apart and make a somewhat decent expression. It's much easier for me to think of good novelists than good short story writers. Let's try - Hemingway, Poe, Bradbury, Chekhov, maybe a few more. Well, I guess Jhumpa Lahiri can join the exclusive club. Her novel *The Namesake* left me wanting more, but her short stories are very well-done. Apparently the Pulitzer people thought the same thing.

If I were to describe the stories in *Interpreter of Maladies* in a single word, it'd be "*melancholy*". They are permeated by **quiet, subdued, rich, and almost beautiful sadness; sorrow that paradoxically sometimes seems almost uplifting, even cathartic**. The stories are slow to unfold, contemplative, intensely lyrical, nostalgic, and quietly moving.

*"Still, there are times I am bewildered by each mile I have traveled, each meal I have eaten, each person I have known, each room in which I have slept. As ordinary as it all appears, there are times when it is beyond my imagination."*

Lahiri writes about India and Indian heritage, be it Indian immigrants to American university towns or

people in India. The country itself, its culture, its beliefs, its traditions, and the pain of missing it are ever-present in her fiction. *The Namesake* dealt with exactly the same premise, and the similarities between that novel and these stories are profound. The similar theme, repeating over and over in the stories, makes you anticipate the storylines, but somehow it does not detract from enjoyment of the prose and the stories. **It's not about the plot;** Lahiri's storytelling hinges on the inner world of her characters, their hopes, dreams, and memories.

*"Whenever he is discouraged, I tell him that if I can survive on three continents, then there is no obstacle he cannot conquer. While the astronauts, heroes forever, spent mere hours on the moon, I have remained in this new world for nearly thirty years. I know that my achievement is quite ordinary. I am not the only man to seek his fortune far from home, and certainly I am not the first. Still, there are times I am bewildered by each mile I have traveled, each meal I have eaten, each person I have known, each room in which I have slept. As ordinary as it all appears, there are times when it is beyond my imagination."*

Overall, I enjoyed this story collection quite a bit. I chose to ration it over a few days rather than swallow them all at once, and it was a good experience. **I definitely recommend this book and easily give it 4 stars.** Now I'd be curious to see if and how Lahiri can expand her themes and touch on the subjects other than immigrant experience.

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### **Fabian says**

You know a book is good when someone asks you for a synopsis, or snippet, or impression, and all you can do is smile there, enveloped in some subtle magic that only you know about, & kinda forget what it was all about altogether. This happened with "Interpreter of Maladies", a perfectly-titled collection of short stories about Indian Americans in India or in the U.S. Their ages & experiences range from children to marrieds to 103 year-olds, from tourism in the old world to the assimilation to a new one.

The first story makes me shiver just thinking about it--I made my students read it as an example of the perfect short story. And the last one encapsulates the author's overall thesis perfectly. It's all a masterpiece & kind of a true privilege to read.

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### **Michael Finocchiaro says**

I really enjoyed this collection pf short stories that won the Pulitzer in 2000. Lahiri's limpid text evokes the sadness and nostalgia of being an ex-par - something I can definitely identify with. She has a wonderful word palette allowing her to create these small snapshots of life as a Bengali. My favorite was the title story about a part-time taxi driver taking an American family around to see temples near Calcutta. The driver interprets for country people at a medical clinic as he studied languages that are no longer widely spoken. The way in which the author invokes the cultural distance between the driver and the tourists and his infatuation with the mother/wife of the family is beautiful without being sappy - and sincere enough that the woman actually confesses an infidelity to him. The saddest story I felt was that of Mrs. Sen who takes brief care of little Elliot for a short time in which he learns about frailty and loneliness (mirrored between that of his mother and that of Mrs. Sen). The last story is the most positive and demonstrates how love can evolve from arranged marriages - sometimes due to the most unlikely circumstances.

This is a beautiful book (and completes my reading of all Pulitzer winners between 2000 and 2016) and makes me want to read her longer fiction such as *The Namesake*.

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### **Dolors says**

*“Interpreter of maladies”* evokes that space in limbo, that straddling identity of immigrants trying to start a new life abroad and the cultural displacement they suffer both in their native and adopted countries. Enriched with colorful details of the Indian tradition, cuisine and celebrations, this collection of nine stories addresses the universal struggle of getting adapted to the ways of a foreign homeland without losing one’s original roots.

Lahiri’s prose is fluid and simple, but it more than meets the challenge of building a bridge between two different worlds with amazing precision, delineating a tight-knitted atmosphere that serves as common ground for all the stories. Men and women who strive for balance in arranged marriages, resisting the strain of prolonged homesickness, isolation and guilt; feelings deeply rooted in the complex web of human relationships that alter the way time, place and expectations are perceived.

The characters that populate Lahiri’s world live in the tense duality of being exiles, but proud to have left India to build a prosperous life in the West. Their Indian heritage acts as a catalyst for all the events that seem to unfold in slow motion like a sequence of images that uphold the solitary confinement of the characters, leading up to an anticlimactic outcome that is muffled by the mundane quality of the troubles that haunt them.

The succinct, restrained expression of Lahiri’s storytelling is gradually accumulated and acquires the poetic force of what has been hinted at but not completely articulated into words; a full world of possibilities that amounts to a summation of silent questions that don’t aspire to be answered.

The future is put on hold in that familiar sensation of not knowing what is going to cross our paths next, maybe an opportunity, maybe a reversal, maybe a caressing whisper that assures us that everything is going to be alright. Or maybe all at once, making a perfect conjunction of imperfect circumstances, just like it happens more often than not in everyday life.

Maybe that’s the reason why Lahiri’s stories sound so intimate and real; because they tell our life stories with all their mundane struggles without dismissing the beauty of their ordinariness.

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### **Jim Fonseca says**

How’s this for blurbs: when the female author published this collection of short stories at age 32 in 1999, she won the Pulitzer Prize, the Pen/Hemingway Award and the New Yorker’s Debut Book of the Year.

Like the author’s other collection of shorts that I have reviewed (*Unaccustomed Earth*, 2008) these stories are about Bengali immigrants in the US from the Bengal area of India, around Kolkata (formerly Calcutta). There are about 250 million Bengalis in the subcontinent, about 2/3 making up the Muslim nation of Bangladesh and about 1/3, mostly Hindus, in West Bengal, a state in India.

But, with the exception of two stories, these folks are not urban slum dogs --they are upper-income folks with PhD's and MD's who grew up speaking English in India and who came to the USA to be doctors, professors and engineers in the high-tech beltway bandit firms around Boston. They live in Boston townhouses and upscale suburbs. And there's a twist to saying these stories are about "immigrants" because most folks in these stories were fully assimilated into the global upper class before they even arrived in the USA.

Here's a sample of what the nine stories are about:

In the title story, a man who is an interpreter of native Indian languages for a doctor is also a tour guide for visitors to India. He tells this to a Bengali couple, with their kids, visiting from the states. The wife, desperate for someone to confide in, thinks he is like a psychological counselor and pours out her secrets, shocking the tour guide.

In "Mrs. Sen's," an eleven-year old boy learns the depth of the loneliness of a Bengali woman in Boston who desperately misses her native country and her large extended family back in India.

"A Real Durwan" is one of two stories set back in India, not in the USA. A poverty-stricken old woman, bent with age, has a job sweeping the stairwell in an apartment building. She sleeps on a pile of rags below the mailboxes. As improvements are made to the building the tenants decide they want a real concierge and toss her onto the street.

In "Sexy," a young Bengali woman listens every day to her Bengali co-worker aghast at the infidelity of her cousin's husband who has left his wife for a younger unmarried woman. Although she and the co-worker are best of friends, the Bengali woman can't tell her that she herself is having an affair with a married man.

In "This Blessed House," a young Bengali couple has just moved into a new home and they keep finding posters of Jesus behind closet doors, crosses, statues of Mary in the bushes and nativity scenes in nooks and corner. Over her husband's objections, the wife collects these and displays them on the mantle. " 'We're not Christian,' Sanjeev said. Lately he had begun noticing the need to state the obvious to Twinkle." Sanjeev is an introverted engineer. And it could just be that life-of-the-party Twinkle, despite her poor housekeeping skills, could just be the complementary partner Sanjeev needs if he has sense to hold on to her.

The stories in the author's collection, *Unaccustomed Earth*, were very good but *Maladies* is excellent. No wonder it won so many awards.

Map from [portcities.org.uk](http://portcities.org.uk)

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**Darwin8u says**

*"He learned not to mind the silences."*  
? Jhumpa Lahiri, Interpreter of Maladies

Some of the stories were brilliant, some were very good and only a couple were meh. This novel captures for

me the right tension between foreignness and loneliness and those small wires, crumbs of connection that bridge people and cultures. Yeah, I dug it.

Personally, I don't care about awards (See William H. Gass). And I really don't care that she's a woman (other than the fact that I'm trying to read more women this year) or that she's Indian American (although both are a significant part of this collection).

I don't believe she was subsidized for either being a woman or being Indian, or if she was I really don't care. Everybody is subsidized by something. White men get the white men subsidy. The rich get the rich subsidy. The educated get the educated subsidy. The poor and broken get the helluva life story subsidy. If I could sum it up, I'd guess that this book probably won the writer lottery: the right good book gets published at the perfect momemnt.

The stories themselves gave me the same temperate, nuanced, soft vibe I get when I read Kazuo Ishiguro or Julian Barnes. So, at least in my mind, she fits/resonates more into/with the: über-educated, upper-middle, British/East Coast US, 'outsider now inside' club(s) more than the female writer or even Indian American clubs. But then again, I could be wrong.

Anyway, I don't have to say that this was her first published book and she still ended up writing (from what I've heard) solid, serious fiction. So that.

### **Brilliant stories:**

A Temporary Matter  
Interpreter of Maladies  
Mrs Sen's  
This Blessed House

### **Good stories:**

When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine  
Sexy  
The Third and Final Continent

### **Meh stories:**

A Real Durwan  
The Treatment of Bibi Halder

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### **Jr Bacdayan says**

There are certain things in life that bewilder and baffle us with their staggering normality. Things so simple yet unmistakably captivating, common-place yet elegant, subtle yet profound. Jumpha Lahiri's Pulitzer Prize winning collection of short stories is one of those things. She writes with a grace and an elegance that transforms her simple stories into a delicate myriad of words and feelings. Each story transforming you into a singularity bound to its harmonious beauty. The different stories somehow seem to be explicitly woven together to make a sari of the most beautiful kind. I felt this cumulative effect of an interconnection between

all these produced feelings. This delicious melancholy that only the deepest parts of our soul can feel.

"She watched his lips forming the words, at the same time she heard them under her skin, under her winter coat, so near and full of warmth that she felt herself go hot."

"It was only then, raising my water glass in his name, that I knew what it meant to miss someone who was so many miles and hours away, just as he had missed his wife and daughters for so many months."

Her stories transcend the cultural & ethnic aspect of things, any person can relate to all these experiences. For me, Interpreter of Maladies is a humanistic book that highlights the common experiences of all people, not just the Indians, while at the same time showcasing a rich culture that some people are not familiar with. She made me feel attached and connected to these characters that had few similarities with me. She made me feel the bond with these people, their experiences, their sadness, their joys, their pain. She made me understand. She made me long for home. She made me feel human.

"Eventually I took a square of white chocolate out of the box, and unwrapped it, and then I did something I had never done before. I put the chocolate in my mouth, letting it soften until the last possible moment, and then as I chewed it slowly, I prayed that Mr. Pirzada's family was safe and sound. I had never prayed for anything before, had never been taught or told to, but I decided, given the circumstances, that it was something I should do. That night when I went to the bathroom I only pretended to brush my teeth, for I feared that I would somehow rinse the prayer out as well. I wet the brush and rearranged the tube of paste to prevent my parents from asking any questions, and fell asleep with sugar on my tongue."

This book shines a light into the dark recesses of our lives. Into those places where we keep our darkest secrets, those places that even we may not be aware of. It shines a light, not a glaring white light from a bulb or a fluorescent, but rather a small light. A light from a candle that illuminates only the most necessary of things. Those things we often neglect when the bright light showcases everything around us. The weak candle-light casts a melancholy feeling only to these important things. But really, maybe that melancholy light is all we need to notice things that really matter.

"In the dimness, he knew how she sat, a bit forward in her chair, ankles crossed against the lowest rung, left elbow on the table."

"They each took a candle and sat down on the steps."

"Something happened when the house was dark. They were able to talk to each other again."

"Once it was dark and he began kissing her awkwardly on her forehead and her face, and though it was dark he closed his eyes, and he knew that she did too."

"As he watched the couple, the room went dark and he spun around. Shoba turned the lights off. She came back to the table and sat down, and after a moment Shukumar joined her. They wept together, for the things they now knew."

As I end, let me borrow from the book's goodreads summary. I do believe that this paragraph captures that very essence of Ms. Lahiri's beautiful craftsmanship.

"There are times I am bewildered by each mile I have traveled, each meal I have eaten, each person I have known, each room in which I have slept." In that single line Jhumpa Lahiri sums up a universal experience, one that applies to all who have grown up, left home, fallen in or out of love, and, above all, experienced what it means to be a foreigner, even within one's own family.

"As ordinary as it all appears, there are times when it is beyond my imagination."

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## Ahmad Sharabiani says

### Interpreter of Maladies, Jhumpa Lahiri

Interpreter of Maladies is a book collection of nine short stories by Indian American author Jhumpa Lahiri published in 1999. It won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award in the year 2000. The stories are about the lives of Indians and Indian Americans who are caught between their roots and the "New World."

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## João Carlos says

### Jhumpa Lahiri (n. 1967)

**Nilanjana Sudeshna "Jhumpa" Lahiri** nasceu a 11 de Julho de 1967 em Londres, Reino Unido, filha de pais indianos, que emigraram de Calcutá, no estado de Bengala Ocidental. Dois anos depois a sua família mudou-se para Kingston, Rhode Island, nos Estados Unidos da América.

"**Jhumpa**" foi o diminutivo que a sua educadora de infância lhe deu para "evitar" pronunciar **Nilanjana Sudeshna**.

Em 1999 publica o seu primeiro livro, um conjunto de nove contos, **”intérprete de enfermidades”** que venceu em 2000 o **Prémio Pulitzer para Ficção** e o **PEN/Hemingway Award**.

Em 2001, casou-se com Alberto Lahiri Vourvoulias-Bush, um jornalista.

**Jhumpa Lahiri** vive actualmente em Roma, Itália, com o seu marido e os dois filhos.

**”intérprete de enfermidades”** é uma excelente colectânea de contos, com uma temática comum, a imigração Indiana para os Estados Unidos da América; homens, mulheres e crianças que enfrentam inúmeros desafios, numa perspectiva social e económica, procurando oportunidades para a melhoria das condições de vida.

A narrativa de **Jhumpa Lahiri** é admirável, construindo histórias que se podem “interligar”, num processo de transição e de assimilação, que vão criando vários comportamentos e várias expectativas, umas que se concretizam e outras que nunca se vão concretizar, existindo alguns factores culturais e sociais, que no início estão fortemente enraizados e que progressivamente se vão diluindo.

A temática do amor e do casamento – a felicidade conjugal - domina alguns dos contos, cristalizando atitudes por vezes díspares, feitas de segredos, silêncios e mistérios. Nessa vivência diária nem sempre a comunicação entre o casal é integralmente compartilhada, as diferentes perspectivas sobre a vida podem, nalguns casos, fomentar a discórdia e o conflito.

As relações entre pais e filhos estão, normalmente, associadas à evolução na integração social e cultural, acabando, invariavelmente, por se revelarem na manutenção das tradições e dos costumes religiosos, conservando ou não, algumas das rotinas diárias que tinham na Índia, acentuadas, quase sempre, pela diferença geracional.

Acontecimentos históricos, eventos que acontecem na Índia, Paquistão e nos Estados Unidos da América; as questões ambientais e a preservação do ambiente são igualmente abordadas.

Depois há o passado e o presente, memórias traumáticas, que desencadeiam comportamentos divergentes, porque existem desafios, como, a língua, o modo de vestir, a culinária e muitos outros, que nem sempre são susceptíveis de serem superados.

A escrita de **Jhumpa Lahiri** é metódica e imaginativa, muito bem estruturada, num estilo minimalista – estamos a ler contos – e que se revela numa surpreendente leitura.

**Os melhores contos (5 Estrelas) de “intérprete de enfermidades”** são: **“Um Problema Temporário”**, **“Intérprete de Enfermidades”** e **“Esta Abençoada Casa”**.

(view spoiler)

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### **Nishat says**

In this stirring collection of short stories, Jhumpa Lahiri displays the diasporic struggle of men, assailed by nightmares of home, over the dilemma of assimilating into the new world or holding on to the past culture.

The author exhibits her majestic power of story telling with such grace and allure that the most wonderful thing happened to me today. I seemed to have lost the sense of 'time' while reading this splendid depiction of the plight of the homeless. This doesn't happen often.

I was put into a trance by Lahiri's portrayal of the bereaved couple lamenting the death of their unborn child and confiding their frightful secrets in the dark during an electrical outage. When Mr. Pirzada came to dine, I as well prayed for the conflicts to come to an end and for the rightful birth of my country. When Miranda wronged a stranger, the vermillion, promising marital bliss threatened me too. Along with the girl once gripped by a mysterious ailment, I was cured. Like the interpreter of maladies, I have dreamt of settling disputes of which I alone can understand. After all, home has beckoned us all.

My thoughts have been vigorously rejigged. Lahiri's steadfast curiosity about human valor and her beautiful drawing of human spirit have left me stunned.

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### **Brina says**

In 2000 Jhumpa Lahiri became the first Indian American to win the Pulitzer Prize for fiction for her short story collection *The Interpreter of Maladies*. In these nine poignant stories, Lahiri relates the Indian immigrant experience, connecting the tales and creating one voice for them. The stories shared a sadness of being separated from one's family by thousands of miles, yet also offered a glimmer of hope for their lives in India or the United States.

Not generally a reader of short stories, this year I read two powerful novels, *Homegoing* and *The Book of Unknown Americans*, which told one story in vignettes. Unlike these two books, however, *Maladies* is nine separate stories which share one overarching theme. The characters never meet even if they came from the same city in India to the same city in America, craving the company and friendship of other Indian Americans. Lahiri does a masterful job of giving purpose to her protagonists even if in some cases we only get to know them for fifteen short pages. As each story begins in a negative light and ends positively, the reader looks forward to each successive story in the collection.

Even though each story is brilliant in its own right, three stand out in creating an upbeat environment upon conclusion: the keynote story *The Interpreter of Maladies* where Mrs. Das comes to terms with herself as the story ends; *The Story of Bibi Haldar* where the title character is ostracized and desires to marry above all else; and the ending story *The Third and Final Continent* with an unnamed protagonist who looks back on his first days in America thirty years later. All share the theme of Indians who find it easier to hang on their customs than assimilate, creating people proud of their culture yet longing for their old country. This did not seem all too different to me than immigrants from other ethnicities and Lahiri does a superb job of making the Indian experience stand alone.

Lahiri was raised in suburban Boston in Rhode Island and appears to create her characters from childhood memories. Whether it was two Indian girls going trick or treating or a newlywed couple grappling with whether to observe Hinduism or Christianity, the stories are written in a labor of love. Each story is penned with the details of the color and texture of the women's saris to the brand of tea that the characters drank. From reading the stories of these immigrants, I felt empathy with their lives as second half twentieth century arrivals to America.

Jhumpa Lahiri has weaved together stories of sadness yet has her readers leave feeling positive about her characters. Although short in length, each story is powerful from start to finish and has the readers desiring to know more about the characters' lives. A collection worthy of the Pulitzer, I look forward to reading more of Lahiri's work. Interpreter of Maladies rates 5 bright stars.

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### **Elizabeth (Alaska) says**

Amazing, extraordinary - there aren't enough superlatives for this one!

The first story, *A Temporary Matter* tells of a young married couple who must endure a one hour power outage for five consecutive nights. They determine that in the darkness they will tell each other something they've never before told one another. In just a few pages Lahiri exposes the secret feelings of these individuals. And then she ends the story in a completely unexpected way. Rarely will I gasp while reading, though shedding tears is commonplace. I did both.

Lahiri also has a way of seeing and describing ordinary objects in a new and different way - new to me anyway. In a later story, this sentence I read and reread:

The beach was barren and dull to play on alone; the only neighbors who stayed on past Labor Day, a young married couple, had no children, and Eliot no longer found it interesting to gather broken mussel shells in his bucket, or to stroke the seaweed, strewn like strips of emerald lasagna on the sand.

Emerald lasagna is such a perfect description. Never again will I see seaweed without thinking of this story of Eliot and Mrs. Sen, who wouldn't learn to drive, who chopped vegetables with her special knife from "home" and who wanted whole fish to cook.

Each of the nine stories in *Interpreter of Maladies* shares people in slightly different situations. Lahiri's characters are ordinary people made extraordinary. They lead simple lives, but see life as special. She makes it special for me.

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### **Olivier Delaye says**

Another reread, another winner.

This is Jhumpa Lahiri's first published work, one for which she received the Pulitzer Prize in 2000, and deservedly so. Indeed, it takes a talented writer to make the normality of everyday life appealing (at least to me), and in this endeavor Lahiri passes with flying colors. As you may already know, *Interpreter of Maladies* is not a novel but a collection of 9 short stories, which I will now review in turn, albeit briefly.

A TEMPORARY MATTER is about an Indian-American couple who's on the skids due to the stillbirth of their first child. They then take the opportunity of several power outages to try and rekindle their relationship. While the writing is utterly delicious—descriptive yet pithy, clever yet reader-friendly—I did not really like this story because of its bittersweet ending. I know, call me schmaltzy!

WHEN MR. PIRZADA CAME TO DINE is about the war between East Pakistan (Bangladesh) and India, but viewed miles and miles away in America through the eyes of an Indian-American family and their Pakistani friend (the eponymous Mr. Pirzada). It's also a reflective (and informative) work on cultural differences in the US, and all in all, I found it to be quite a satisfying read.

INTERPRETER OF MALADIES is about an Indian-American family visiting famous sights in India with their Indian guide. But beyond sightseeing, it's first and foremost a story about dissatisfaction, unfaithfulness, repressed attraction, confession and interpretation of said feelings through the introspective lens of cultural differences. It is in my opinion the strongest story in this collection.

A REAL DURWAN: I found this story about an old woman who is ill-treated by the residents of the building she works in as a sweeper to be the weakest of the lot. Sure, Lahiri masterfully portrays how mean people can be... but then again there's nothing new here. Unfortunately.

SEXY explores the mind of a Caucasian woman dating a married Indian man and what it means for her to be his mistress. Again, there's a lot of repressed feelings and introspection going on here, and if you're hoping for a sweet little ending all tied up with a lovely bow... well, you'll be disappointed.

MRS. SEN'S is my favorite story of the collection. It's about an Indian-American woman (Mrs. Sen) who takes care of a young boy (Eliot) during the day when his mother is at work. The writing is perfect, sometimes tongue-in-cheek, always polished like a newly minted penny, subtly tackling the cultural differences that exist between "mainstream Americans" and "not-quite-fully-assimilated" Indian-Americans—or should I say, Indian-Americans refusing to assimilate, as it is very much the case here with Mrs. Sen. Lahiri conveys so much in this story without ever stating it on the page that the word "telepathy" comes to mind. It's almost "Hemingway-esque" in its execution. Another proof of how talented a writer she is.

THIS BLESSED HOUSE is about a newly married Indian-American couple who keep discovering catholic paraphernalia in the house they just bought and moved in. The husband isn't sure about his feelings for his wife, who's as ingénue and naïve as a child. Good but not great. The prose, however, is perfect.

THE TREATMENT OF BIBI HALDAR deals with an Indian girl in India whose "strange disease" (I take it to be epilepsy, although it's never stated as such in the text) has rendered her kind of antisocial and unfit to marry, which is a shame as the treatment of her disease, according to doctors, consists in her getting married (?!). I really liked this one, and for once, I find the ending satisfactory, if not at all what I expected. It also gives a nice (and sad) insight into Indian marital traditions, superstitions and caste-related beliefs that, apparently, are still very much relevant nowadays in India.

THE THIRD AND FINAL CONTINENT tells the story of an Indian immigrant to America. Narrated in the first person, it concludes the collection nicely.

OLIVIER DELAYE  
Author of the SEBASTEN OF ATLANTIS series

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## **MJ Nicholls says**

This collection won the Pen/Hemingway Award, the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and—most impressively—the New Yorker Debut of the Year. When a book receives this amount of awards, it's a) lazy—why give two prestigious prizes to the SAME book? b) going to give the reader unrealistic expectations and c) a conspiracy of critics. This collection arrived at a time when an Indian writer hadn't been given a Pulitzer or important award, and the committee wanted to expand its reach outside middle-class white male Americans. The stories, mercifully, still contain American settings, but have enough watered down Indianness in them to appeal to a mass market, and enough simple sentiment and sentence structure to universalize love loss sadness relationships and so on. Also, Jhumpa is a woman, and a woman hadn't won in a while. The stories in this collection are fine but all utilise the same straightforward, overly descriptive, consciously “traditional” narrative voice, one that doesn't take risks or explore interesting forms or ideas, falling back on saccharine or poetic tropes to go for the heartstrings and not the intellect, using human dramas in far-off homelands to manipulate the immigrant reader rather than new or novel techniques. This is not to say she isn't a talented writer. Only I feel violently this mode of writing is beating a middlebrow, Oprah-shaped drum, and doesn't do much except warm a heart or state the obvious.

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