

SO MANY PEOPLE, MARIANA

Maria Judite de Carvalho, translated from Portuguese by Margaret Jull Costa

1. Many stories in *So Many People, Mariana* feature female characters whose lives are “over,” according to their society, when they reach 35 or 40 years old. What role does literature play in working against sexist and ageist prejudice, and what kinds of ongoing life do these stories make visible?
2. Written between 1959 and 1967, the stories in this collection cover roughly the last decade of the 35-year Salazar regime, which had the mantra of “God, Fatherland, and Family.” How does the weaponization of religious and family values affect the characters in Carvalho’s stories?
3. In “Life and Dream,” the narrator observes that “we do not make ourselves; we are shaped by circumstances” (pg. 53). In what ways do these stories push back against futility and create forms of agency, even if only within the space of the text?
4. Many stories feature permutations of consciousness, flights of fancy, or retreats into memory. What do these nonlinear perambulations, or “small respites,” offer to characters, and is what they offer always temporary (pg. 199)? What is the role of literary language in creating fleeting or permanent forms of refuge and respite?
5. Carvalho’s stories draw attention to the neglect or erasure of the self, not always but often among women. What pressures toward dissolution do these stories highlight? How do the stories, if not their characters, work against self-erasure?
6. How is Portugal’s global position—its relationship with other European countries and its colonial territories—evident in these stories? What role do “elsewhere” places play for characters?
7. What strategies do these stories use to represent the hypocrisy of social taboos and the cruelty of their enforcement? How does Carvalho use humor, mockery, cynicism, overheard gossip, madness, and memory to circumvent or expose enforced silences?
8. Novels by modernist women writers such as Virginia Woolf, Marguerite Duras, and Clarice Lispector often thematize tedium, duration, and enclosure to reflect women’s experiences. How does Carvalho’s voice expand or complicate the canon of women’s modernist literature? How does her choice of short forms (novellas, short stories) relate to the themes she explores?



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