

**Queer Sensoriums: Natural “Seeing” and Attachment
Beyond Exclusion in *Cereus Blooms at Night*
by Shani Mootoo**

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ABSTRACT

Cereus Blooms at Night by Shani Mootoo simultaneously presents as an innovative contemporary addition to Caribbean mythology and folklore, inclusive of relationship-building and coexistence beyond sexual, human-nonhuman, racial, colonial, and ableist binaries, and as a form of resistance against the limitations of verbal communication, by reimagining the experiences of trauma and mental disability through scientific and sensual language coinciding with perceptions of the natural world. The novel constructs queer-centric futures unconstrained by dichotomies which implode the nuclear family, and permeate binary norms of behavior which exclude other forms of multispecies existence and harm them as indicators of inextricable postcolonial contempt- and disgust-based hierarchies. Mootoo utilizes techniques including multigenerational narrative stream-of-consciousness, first- and third-person intimate perspectives, magical realism, and the gay saga to illuminate more inclusive futures born from the lessons of prejudicial violence. However, the trope of the idyllic and Edenic Caribbean reverts in scenes of environmental and psychological disintegration which convey sensuous stratifications based on sights, smells, tastes, and tactility in the wilderness symbolic of societal prejudices, reverting “advanced” human civilizations by comparison into bestial and underdeveloped regions beset by networks of repetitive and uncontrollable oppressive relations. By proposing “queer sensoriums” as definitive of perceiving as the natural world without imposing upon or disrupting ecosystems of human-nonhuman existence, Mootoo’s work can be redefined as an essential contribution toward ethical ways of being with and associating with one another without replicating centuries-old manifestations of oppression which lay unnecessary waste upon lives and existences regardless of identitarian divisions.

Keywords: environmental, caribbean, perception, queerness, intersectionality