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Subverting the Lesbian-Gay Agenda: A Re-examination of Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*

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Abstract

In Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* Mala Ramchandani has been driven to insanity by a series of cataclysmic events – her mother's abandonment of the family and the marital home, the fleeing of her beloved sister, a protracted period of sexual and physical abuse at the hands of her father, the loss of her lover and their inevitable corollary of acute psychic trauma. Working against an assumed heterosexual normativity of gender relations, Mootoo explores dichotomies, inner compulsions and outer markers of sexuality and gender and so establishes a continuum of sexual identities and sexual behaviours in antithesis to the male-female, masculine-feminine polarities. There are instances, however, where the novel contradicts its own agenda. The central argument of this paper is that while Mootoo makes good on undermining heterosexual privilege and subverting entrenched binary constructions of gender and sexual identity, this is limited as far as the novel, at times, rather than challenging hegemonic modes of belonging, ossifies them. Inadvertently, Mootoo thus contravenes what I construe as her trust placed in "the power of the printed word to reach many people" (Mootoo, 1998: 4).
