

“Out on Main Street” and “Lemon Scent”

Shani Mootoo

Cultural Authenticity in “Out on Main Street”

This story has often been analyzed for its complicated portrayal of authenticity and cultural hybridity. Trinidad’s history of colonization, enslavement, and indentured servitude informs hybridization of cultures and the power/privilege differences between racial groups. What does the narrator mean when they say that they and Janet are “watered-down Indians”? How does the notion of authenticity inform how they interact with the men at the restaurant?

References to food are very common in postcolonial and ethnic literatures. How does food become a marker of culture? How do narratives of food relay arguments about cultural authenticity?

Space, Gender, and Sexuality in “Out on Main Street”

How does Mootoo intersperse ideas about geography and diaspora with notions of public urban space? Think about how references to India and Trinidad intersect and interact with the narrative of walking down main street.

There are moments in the story when the narrator feels invisible and hypervisible. What leads to this sense of being watched/erased? How can you read the theory through gaze theory (the argument that looking and gazing is as act of consumption created by gendered/racialized power)?

How does public space, especially the space of the restaurant, influence the gendered presentation of the narrator and Janet?

Space, Gender, and Sexuality in “Lemon Scents”

In mainstream queer literature, nature is often portrayed as dangerous, and the metropole is portrayed as a site of liberation. How does Mootoo’s story subvert this common narrative?

Think about the literary strategies employed by the author to create a tender and erotic reading experience. What kinds of sense are evoked in the story? What do these references to senses and sensations do for the reader?