

ISSN 1300-574-X

VOLUME 22.1-2
SPRING-FALL



INTERACTIONS

VOLUME 22.1-2

ARTICLES

- Gönül Bakay 1 Two Postmodern Perspectives on the Rosenberg Case
- Catalina Botez 13 Post-Holocaust Interactions: Means of Defamiliarising Reality in Raymond Federman's *The Voice in the Closet*
- Burç İdem Dinçel 31 Theatre as Text: Brian Friel's *Translations* and Some Implications for Staging
- Özlem Görey 45 "The Middle Woman" from *Nepantla*: Sameness and Difference in the Poetry of Pat Mora
- N. Sibel Güzel 55 The Cultural Discourse of a Cholera Pandemic, Misuse of Science and Hawthorne's Two Stories
- Elif Kelebek 69 "Dissolved by Rhetoric": James Merrill's Istanbul and the Pursuit of Authenticity
- Zennure Köseman 81 Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Eliot's *The Waste Land* in the Context of Myth-Making in Jungian Perspective
- Elif Öztabak-Avcı 93 An "Ideological Servant"? A Study of the Servant Figure in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*
- Mine Özyurt Kılıç 105 Imagining Others' Worlds by Dint of Her Trade: Maggie Gee's *My Cleaner* and *My Driver*
- Seda Pekşen 119 An Analysis of the Power Relations Between White and Black Women in the Slave Narratives
- Şebnem Toplu & Matı Turyel 129 Relocating Chinese-Jewish-British Identity in *The Autograph Man* by Zadie Smith
- Himmat Umunç 145 *Hamlet*: The Tragedy of A Renaissance Mind
- Şebnem Toplu 153 *Projections of Paradise Ideal Elsewheres in Postcolonial Migrant Literature*

REVIEWS

Projections of Paradise Ideal Elsewheres in Postcolonial Migrant Literature



Ege University Press
Bornova - IZMİR, 2013



INTERACTIONS

EGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Ege Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları

Ege İngiliz ve Amerikan İncelemeleri Dergisi
Ege Journal of British and American Studies

INTERACTIONS

Spring/Fall

Volume/Cilt: 22.1-2

Year/Yıl: 2013

EGE UNIVERSITY PUBLISHING HOUSE
Bornova-İZMİR
2013

Publisher **Yayın Sahibi**
On behalf of Ege University, Ege Üniversitesi adına,
Dean of the Faculty of Letters, Ersin Doğer Edebiyat Fakültesi Dekanı, Ersin Doğer

Managing Editor **Sorumlu Yazı İşleri Müdürü**
Atilla Silkü Atilla Silkü

INTERACTIONS address **Yayın İdare Adresi**
Ege University, Faculty of Letters, Ege Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi,
Departments of English Language & Literature, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı ile
and American Culture & Literature, Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı Bölümleri,
Bornova 35100 Izmir, TÜRKİYE Bornova 35100 Izmir, TÜRKİYE

Printed by **Basıldığı Yer ve Matbaa**
Ege University Publishing House Ege Üniversitesi Basımevi

Copies and Date **Baskı Adeti ve Basım Tarihi**
130 copies, 15 April 2013 130 adet, 15 Nisan 2013

T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Sertifika No: 18679

Interactions is published annually.
Contents indexed in *MLA International Bibliography*
and *GALE CENGAGE Learning* database Academic OneFile
© 2013 Ege University, Faculty of Letters

ISSN 1300-574-X

Editors

Şebnem Toplu
Atilla Silkü

Assistant Editor

Gülden Hatipoğlu

Advisory Board

Eleftheria Arapoglou, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
Silvia Albertazzi, University of Bologna
Aylin Atilla, Ege University
Işıl Baş, Boğaziçi University
Mackie Blanton, Southeastern Louisiana University
Deniz Bozer, Hacettepe University
Giovanna Buonanno, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia
Gülşen Canlı, Atılım University
Eleonora Chiavetta, University of Palermo
Anita P. Chirco, Keuka College
Jan Chovanec, Masaryk University
Anna Izabella Cichon, University of Wrocław
Carla Comellini, University of Bologna
Catherine Coussens, Çankaya University
Bilge Mutluay Çetintaş, Hacettepe University
Dilek Direnç, Ege University
Dilek Doltaş, Doğuş University
Seçkin Ergin, Yaşar University
Nilsen Gökçen, Dokuz Eylül University
Klára Kolinská, Prague Metropolitan University
Nevin Koyuncu, Ege University
Ivar Kvistad, Deakin University
Ewa Koblowska-Lawniczak, University of Wrocław
Teresa Gibert Maceda, Madrid UNED
Kevin McNamara, University of Houston-Clear Lake
Lütfiye Oktar, İzmir University of Economics
Andrew Radford, University of Glasgow
Laurence Raw, Başkent University
Aribert Schroeder, University of Duesseldorf
Atilla Silkü, Ege University
Rezzan Kocaöner Silkü, Ege University
Christiane Schlote, University of Zurich
Silvia Schaltermandl, University of Graz
Miriam Shivan, University of Haifa
Günseli Sönmez İşçi, Yeni Yüzyıl University
Meldan Tarrısal, Hacettepe University
Semiramis Yağcıoğlu, Dokuz Eylül University
Neslihan Kansu Yetkiner, İzmir University of Economics
Ayşegül Yüksel, Ankara University
Hubert Zapf, University of Augsburg

Editorial Assistant

Begüm Tuğlu

CONTENTS

ARTICLES

- Gönül Bakay 1 Two Postmodern Perspectives on the Rosenberg Case
- Catalina Botez 13 Post-Holocaust Interactions: Means of Defamiliarising Reality in Raymond Federman's *The Voice in the Closet*
- Burç İdem Dinçel 31 Theatre as Text: Brian Friel's *Translations* and Some Implications for Staging
- Özlem Görey 45 "The Middle Woman" from *Nepantla*: Sameness and Difference in the Poetry of Pat Mora
- N. Sibel Güzel 55 The Cultural Discourse of a Cholera Pandemic, Misuse of Science and Hawthorne's Two Stories
- Elif Kelebek 69 "Dissolved by Rhetoric": James Merrill's Istanbul and the Pursuit of Authenticity
- Zennure Köseman 81 Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Eliot's *The Waste Land* in the Context of Myth-Making in Jungian Perspective
- Elif Öztapak-Avcı 93 An "Ideological Servant"? A Study of the Servant Figure in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*
- Mine Özyurt Kılıç 105 Imagining Others' Worlds by Dint of Her Trade: Maggie Gee's *My Cleaner* and *My Driver*
- Seda Pekşen 119 An Analysis of the Power Relations Between White and Black Women in the Slave Narratives
- Şebnem Toplu & Mati Turyel 129 Relocating Chinese-Jewish-British Identity in *The Autograph Man* by Zadie Smith
- Himmet Umunç 145 *Hamlet*: The Tragedy of A Renaissance Mind

REVIEWS

- Şebnem Toplu 153 *Projections of Paradise Ideal Elsewheres in Postcolonial Migrant Literature*

155 CONTRIBUTORS

**Imagining Others' Worlds by Dint of Her Trade:
Maggie Gee's *My Cleaner* and *My Driver***

Mine Özyurt Kılıç

Abstract: This article argues that Maggie Gee's sequential novels *My Cleaner* (2005) and *My Driver* (2009) employ the antagonism between the Ugandan Mary Tendo and the English Vanessa Henman as a narrative device to represent both everyday racism and territorial anxiety in contemporary Britain. Giving voice to both Mary and Vanessa and presenting them objectively, they investigate the reasons behind age-old racial tensions and the possible ways of reducing them. The article also claims that Mary's criticism of post-imperial Britain earns her an equal status with those of Gee's earlier white English characters who present a satirical commentary on the recession, unemployment, decay, racism and loss of shared values in their society. Thus, I suggest that while responding to the question of legitimacy of a white British novelist to write about, and through black characters, they highlight that the potential literature has to stimulate thought for imagining difference and creating convivial spaces, characterised by inclusiveness, openness and solidarity.

Keywords: Maggie Gee, *My Cleaner*, *My Driver*, everyday racism, black characters

In her William Matthews Lecture "How May I Speak in my Own Voice?: Language and the Forbidden" delivered at Birkbeck College in 1996, Maggie Gee articulates some of her worries about her trade and wonders if she is encouraged to imagine difference and write about racism in Britain from the perspective of black characters. She asks: "Could I write as a white writer about black people, or through black characters? Are there some taboos which it is wrong to break?" As a white writer, Gee creates a wide range of black characters in her *oeuvre* as early as her debut *Dying, in Other Words* (1981) and *The Burning Book* (1983). *The Ice People* (1998) and *The Flood* (2004) dealing with the antagonism between black and white people more centrally. In these novels, Gee writes mostly about white people, and through white characters. Her black characters do not speak. Although she treats them with empathy, Gee does not assign her early black characters an independent voice. They often feature as minor characters- friends or neighbours to the central white ones- who help Gee to critique racism and fascism. However, written soon after the murder of black Stephen Lawrence by a gang of white hooligans in 1994, Gee's *The White Family* (2002) employs major black characters who now "speak in their own powerful voices" (Özyurt Kılıç 51). In this challenging portrayal of the antagonism between a white family "that might have nurtured racist thugs", and the black characters they interact with, Gee provides answers to the questions she posed in her 1996 lecture as to writing *about* and *through* black characters (2009b, 16).

Yet, Gee's representation of racial antagonism through black characters raises the question of legitimacy: Having no experience of blackness, can a white novelist give her black characters a unique voice? As a writer concerned about these issues for a long time, Gee clearly sees that this question might come from her white readers as well as the black ones and states that in each case she would defend herself against the accusation that she is

'appropriating' the voice of black characters" (Jaggi 304). In her interview with Maya Jaggi on *The White Family*, Gee gives a prompt reply to the question and asserts that:

My initial, instinctive response would be, 'Sod off. I'll write about what I want to.' A more intelligent response would be to acknowledge that if people feel their voice is not represented enough, the last thing they want is for somebody else to nick it; that seems to me quite logical. I think a challenge like this might well have come from black writers who felt under-appreciated or suppressed, and I would respect that. But in fact it didn't. I do think in the end imagining is all about trying to live other lives and create other selves who are superficially unlike us but at a deep level just like us. If white liberals were to tell me I shouldn't be writing through black characters I wouldn't take much notice, whereas I would have taken notice if I had got that reaction from my black readers. (Jaggi 304-5)

The White Family received very positive feedback from her black readers and was soon shortlisted for the Orange and IMPAC prizes after a publishing process Gee describes as "very rocky, very stony, very hard" (Jaggi 301). At first, the manuscript was turned down by five English publishers: they found it "dark", and "they weren't sure whether [Gee] was writing correctly about black people" (Jaggi 303). The book was finally accepted and published by Saqi Press, the main people of which come from the Lebanon, "in that sense outside mainstream British culture" (Jaggi 303). It is interesting that contemporary British fiction has many key figures who both give different representations of Britain through black characters and depict the interaction between black and white subjects, and many of these leading figures are themselves black British writers. Sam Selvon, Hanif Kureishi, Bernardine Evaristo, Zadie Smith, Mike Phillips, Monica Ali and Andrea Levy are among these writers whose works give British fiction its celebrated multicultural character. That Maggie Gee could not easily receive the critical attention she deserves seems to have something to do with her writing about the racial divide in Britain. As she states in the William Matthew Lecture that racism is one of the taboo subjects in England, which Hanif Kureishi also argues in his famous essay "The Rainbow Sign" (1986), Gee tells in her interview that "The English way of dealing with issues about colour is often to say nothing at all [...]" (Jaggi 303). Apparently, this taboo works in the literary market too. Describing the literary climate in contemporary Britain in her article "Literary Apartheid in the post-war London Novel: Finding the Middle Ground", Susie Thomas observes a big divide between black British and white British writers and says that while white novelists write about and are read by whites, black (and Asian British) writers write about and read by their communities (309). Thomas also notes that "Literary magazines such as *Wasafari*, on one side, and *The Times Literary Supplement* on the other, discuss almost wholly different writers and do so as if A.S. Byatt and Aamer Hussein lived on different planets rather than both in London" (310).⁹ This exclusive attitude with which authors feature characters marginal to them as mere stereotypes culminates in a change in mainstream publisher's criteria: they publish what they think will sell best. Thereby, they might be reluctant to publish novels by white British novelists writing about and through black characters.

In her most recent novels *My Cleaner* (2005) and *My Driver* (2009), Maggie Gee takes a step further and employs two alternating first-person narrators. Writing through both her Ugandan character Mary Tendo, a black ex-cleaning lady and her English character Vanessa Henman, a white professor of creative writing, Gee delineates the racial

conflicts in contemporary British society. By exploring the internal world of a black character, she contests the almost established literary norm and imagines how it feels to be a black subject. Set partly in Uganda, one of the ex-colonies of the British Empire, and partly in England, these novels show Maggie Gee shifting her imaginative centre. Considered in this light, I suggest, *My Cleaner* and *My Driver* offer fresh answers to the vital questions Gee asks about writing about and through black characters. Giving voice to both Mary and Vanessa and presenting them objectively, Gee offers a reading experience for us to identify with both of them and go beyond a boundary category of colour and race.

However, representing the sense of otherness that racial prejudices induce through black and white narrative voices, these novels, like *The White Family*, provoke questions of legitimacy. As a writer identified with the apparently stronger group, Gee reflects on her "awkward" position, imagining the inner experience of someone from the "underdog" group, and shares her anxiety, which surface in the form of questions: "Was I still a coloniser, taking over a Ugandan internal world as once Britain entered their physical territory? Was I stealing Ugandan stories?" (2009b, 16). Yet, once again, she rightly proclaims that, as Virginia Woolf suggests in *Between the Acts*, writing is a way of allowing ourselves to enjoy our "unacted parts", and not doing it for fear of being misunderstood can in fact be a kind of silencing, or of "self-censorship" (2009b, 16). In her essay "A Different View", Gee writes that by speaking through Mary Tendo, a black character, in fact she explores others' worlds "by dint of [her] trade" (2009b, 16). This paper will argue that shifting her imaginative centre and enjoying her unacted parts, Gee portrays in *My Cleaner* and *My Driver* the possible ways of understanding and reducing age-old racial antagonisms.

In *My Cleaner* and *My Driver*, Gee represents "everyday racism", a concept Philomena Essed introduced in 1985 to mark the link between ideological dimensions of racism and daily attitudes, and to understand "the reproduction of racism in terms of the experience of it in everyday life" (2). While describing the tension between the English and the black migrant subjects, Gee neither fully aligns herself with, nor completely silences any of the parties. Instead, by writing through both, she explores why and how Mary Tendo and Vanessa Henman cannot understand each other. In other words, as she already acknowledges, Gee "imagine[s] difference" to delineate the intersecting parts of different worlds where biases and prejudices can be erased, and shows that there is no such thing as "awkward" if people are willing to interact and see things from different perspectives (2009b, 16).

Mary Tendo's criticism of Britain in these novels coincides with many of Maggie Gee's earlier white characters who give a grim and grey portrayal of England. Both in *My Cleaner* and *My Driver*, Gee assigns the conventionally white satirical voice of the condition-of-England novels to her black character. Similar to such satirical narrative voices in her earlier novels such as *Grace* (1988), *Lost Children* (1994), *The White Family* (2002) and *The Flood* (2004), Mary Tendo of *My Cleaner* describes the social and cultural decay in England, but does this as an outsider, a Ugandan woman. Coming to London for the second time as an invited guest, eleven years after her first visit when she worked as a cleaner to fund her MA in English, Mary now owns a critical distance to observe the different lives and comment on them. That she is now invited to England to provide emotional support for Vanessa's depressed son Justin, also endows her with the morally superior position rendering her satire more plausible.

Obviously then, by giving Mary a satirising voice, Gee includes her in the repertoire of her sensible and observant characters. Namely, Mary's criticism of England and the English earns her an equal status with those of Gee's earlier white English characters in

Grace, Lost Children, The White Family and *The Flood*, who present a satirical commentary on the recession, unemployment, decay, racism and loss of shared values in their society. A typical comment appears in Mary's arrival scene in which she notices the decaying teeth of the "limp, pale immigration officer". As Mary stares at the officer's grey and uneven lower teeth, she wittily asserts that: "British teeth have seen better days" (*My Cleaner* 56). Almost imitating the nostalgia of Gee's white characters' brooding over decay in their society, she defines England as "the smooth chill world" where everything is going to the dogs (59).

Gee skilfully blends this suggested nostalgic voice with a sharp criticism of racial hegemony by the same black voice, in a scene where Mary remembers the days when she had to clean empty English offices "before the sun came up". Her perception of England is so negative that the shining lights of London nights bring to her mind "a hundred dusty bulbs, in dusty houses" waiting to be cleaned by some domestic servants (*My Cleaner* 23). A metaphor for the fall of the British Empire, Vanessa's lifeless house is one of these dusty English houses and Gee uses its domestic interior as a space where conflicts have long settled in waiting to be resolved.

Both *My Cleaner* and *My Driver* employ the antagonism between Mary and Vanessa as a narrative device to develop Gee's representation of overt racism in contemporary British society. Vanessa's recurrent use of the linguistic binary "us/them" evidences the conflicts that arise from cultural and racial differences very early in the novel. Feeling as if she were under the siege of her Ugandan guest, Vanessa constantly thinks in terms of possessive pronouns and when Mary starts cooking for them she thinks *her* space is invaded and explodes: "the house doesn't feel my own" (*MC* 85). But Mary's dry and matter-of-fact musings about the presence of black people in Britain provide a smart challenge to Vanessa's hostile remarks: "I did my work like the other foreigners, cleaning the offices of the sleeping English. They arrived, yawning, as we went for our breakfast, we hundreds and thousands of people from the empire" (17). As a Ugandan who has travelled extensively in Europe and observed people when she worked as a cleaner, Mary concludes that English people are too lazy to clean their own places and pronounces that she has "never met English people cleaning, except a man compulsively obsessed with cleaning" (265). This hyperbolic statement is justified in the case of Vanessa, who never does her own cleaning. As Vanessa claims defensively that cleaning "isn't brain surgery", Mary briskly retorts: "Cleaning is hard work" and suggests that that is why she does not want to do it. Here, Mary's black voice gains a corrective and reformatory tone, which is one of the defining qualities of good satire.

Through this simmering dispute over cleaning, Gee satirises racist tendencies in contemporary Britain. To contribute to its critical tone, she ends the scene with an ironic touch, which brings poetic justice through humour: As Vanessa and Mary look for a cleaner (since in her second visit, she is invited just to help Justin feel better, thus refuses to clean the house), Mary ironically employs "a very blonde" Polish girl, Anya, who looks very much like Vanessa. A symbolic revenge against the white race that enslaved the black for ages, Mary's comment about her choice adds a light-hearted sarcasm. It obviously reveals the strong link between hiring a cleaner and colonial drives. Empowered by the emotional help she offers in return for money and by her experience in England, Mary owns an assertive voice to ruminate: "I am surprised that I chose a white-skinned cleaner, but it is good for them to learn a new skill" (117).

Gee extends her critique of racial hegemony to consumer culture through Mary when Mary's comparison of the English and Ugandan domestic space evolves into a harsh criticism of urban life in contemporary Britain. She compares her flat in Kampala to

Vanessa's "enormous" house with five bedrooms; "greatly in need of fresh air" (70) and Vanessa's house looks "dark" to her:

These English houses are like lost worlds, detached from each other, buried in trees, overgrown with plants and strangled with secrets. Whereas life in Kampala is lived outside. The houses there have thin walls and big windows, and quarrels and weddings are all in the open, though sometimes people are beaten in secret. But here in London, *everything* is secret. (60-1) (emphasis original)

While comparing Vanessa's English house to Ugandan ones, Mary also criticises the materialist mindset defining power and success in terms of owning property. As opposed to the "clean and airy" Ugandan houses, English ones are "full of little objects. They get dusty and dirty, they break and they fall, they fade and get old, there are more and more of them" (126). Mary feels sorry for the English as she observes that: "Here people have things instead of children" (283). More importantly, Vanessa herself is gradually awakened to the fact that, her house, like many English houses, has "[f]ar too much stuff" and finally decides to get rid of a lot of it (265). Similarly, Gee's depiction of Vanessa in a shopping spree in Kampala in *My Driver* demonstrates the deep-seated drive to possess in middle-class English people. Prior to her visit, Vanessa's image of Uganda is a land of "nothingness"; a "place without shops, lights, artefacts" (190). However, when she finds the opportunity to go shopping, she feels better, although only briefly; soon after feeling satisfied, her anxiety overwhelms her again and she starts asking herself neurotically: "[D]id you buy enough? Did you buy too much? Or perhaps the wrong thing? Back to the shops for more buying" (190).

Gee makes this critique of money-oriented, materialist culture much more centrally in her *Where Are the Snows* (1991) and *The Flood*, but making it also through a black voice brings black and white voices to the same narrative level: Mary's complaints about life in London are not only shared by Vanessa but also by her friend, Fifi. Representative of white middle class women, Fifi makes a similar comment about the suffocating presence of objects and asks Vanessa: "So tell me, what is the point of all this? All the books and pictures and music and photos? All the objects chosen with such exquisite taste? Just to end up in some wretched almshouse" (MC 261-2). However, it is mostly Mary who perceives middle-class habits as signs of lifelessness; after just ten days in London, Mary is "suffocated, stogged with pale England" (79). As she observes, Vanessa, like many other Londoners "never "bother[s] to make soup or stew" and "has never cooked properly" (70, 80). After having Vanessa's "wonderfully easy" dinners with precooked rice and chicken, Mary suffers from constipation and concludes that what makes all the English ill is mainly their consumption of processed food. Interestingly, just like the white middle-class Alex, the protagonist of *Where Are the Snows*, who calls England "a waste of planet", "a waste of life" (1991, 62), Mary observes that London is full of people who have "forgotten how to grow things" (*My Cleaner* 222). Through Mary, Gee describes Britain as a barren field that fails to nourish its people, both physically and spiritually. No matter how often she eats, Mary feels hungry: "It's the weather", she says, "I am always hungry here" (133).

Description of the English people in London by Mary's black voice reveals an ailing society which corresponds to the image of Britain as a decaying country in Gee's earlier novels. Mary thinks that children in England are always sick "with all kinds of problems: eczema, asthma, dyslexia, dyspraxia" (45). And those "lost children" like Justin, "wonderfully lexic and praxic", but "sick in his soul", suffer from depression" (73). Through Justin, a depressed teenager, Gee expands on the theme of alienation and decay in

the novel. Seeing him as grown soft and weak, Mary reckons Justin has become one of those miserable white people. Following this line of thought, she defines the English almost as a new species completely alien to her:

Frankly I think he is ill in the head. But this is harder for me to judge, for in some ways, all the English seem ill in the head, as I found out when I lived here before. They stand in queues, frowning and worrying, touching all their bags to be sure they are still there, and when they talk, it is almost a whisper. They keep saying 'Sorry' or 'Excuse me', and if you look at them, their eyes dart away. And they usually look sad, or in a hurry. They stream into the underground, eyes down, like ants. (69)

Presented as alienated figures, the Londoners of *My Cleaner* are all pale and sullen; she observes that English people lack "[t]hat African sweetness" and they smile much less than [Ugandans] do" (*My Cleaner* 212). Mary's remarks also disclose lack of communication as part of the modern urban landscape. She says that sometimes one sits on the underground "opposite a curtain of papers" severed from all human contact and finds those commuters absorbed in books and papers rather bizarre (165). In a public space that almost bars communication, Mary senses that the English people remain immature. She thinks that "In many ways, [they] are like children", and Vanessa's toy bear sitting on her bed provides visible evidence for her observation (68). After having spent a couple of weeks in London, Mary starts feeling peculiar too, and concludes that it is England that makes her ill: "I suppose the sickness comes from my heart, because recently I am too sad to go dancing, even in church I am sometimes lonely" (206). Later in the novel, many of these comments offered by the central black voice are shared by Vanessa, which comes as an endorsement of these critical remarks.

In *My Cleaner*, Gee depicts modern-day London as the most expensive European city by making Mary complain that in this "hideously expensive" place "even breathing cost money" (44, 37). Unfriendliness almost increases in the currency of the country which makes life unbearably difficult for the majority. Again Mary compares the dark city to her native land and reckons that "Life is so much barer and simpler in Kampala" (63). In the last instance, deeming herself an outcast, she feels "trapped, in a hostile country" (321). To develop the description of the divide between the English and the black migrants, Gee shows Mary readily reclaiming her national identity: "I am an African woman, thanks be to God" (49). Mary's pride functions as an antidote to the hostility and discrimination she suffers as a "Ugandan woman" in England, thus as a plot device, it helps Gee to exercise and promote a different view (49).

Both *My Cleaner* and *My Driver* portray London as a place gaining a multicultural identity and changing into an English capital with many diasporic communities. As they describe the problems that the black people face, they also represent the English having trouble adapting to the change in their society. Doing this, both novels employ Ugandan Mary, with a proud voice as a foil to Vanessa, who shows signs of territorial anxiety. *My Cleaner* represents the state of Britain through the scrutiny of different subjects coming from different worlds. For instance, Vanessa cannot see where Mary finds all these "African things" she uses in the kitchen, and when Mary reminds her that there are many Africans living in London, thus many African things, she does not like what she hears (84). Vanessa complains that "London is full of Africans" and peevishly voices her exclusive stance insisting that: "this is [her] land", "It is [their] country" and "it is [her] house" (84, 91, 93). Strangely, she categorises all the non-English as "Ugandans" and feels that these

Ugandans—Mary, Zakira (Mary's Moroccan friend), Soraya (Vanessa's ex-husband Trevor's girlfriend who is in fact Persian) and Anya (the Polish cleaner) —threaten her domestic peace. Evoking a metaphorical reading of the house as Britain, Gee caricatures Vanessa's anxiety that her *house* will be "full of Ugandans" (*My Cleaner* 183). From Vanessa's point of view, London is becoming infested with black people, which brings to mind Paul Gilroy's argument in his *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* Emphasizing the link between a sense of loss and the resistance to accept the black as makers and owners of British society, Gilroy maintains that the English have not come to terms with the loss of Empire and create convivial spaces characterised by inclusiveness, openness and solidarity like Alfred, the park keeper, and his wife May in *The White Family*, English people in these two novels are portrayed as suffering from melancholia, namely brooding over the loss of their glorious past. To illustrate this post-imperial psychology, Gee inserts a scene from daily life in London; as Mary carelessly plays ringtones on her mobile phone, a "drunkard" turns to Mary and shouts at her saying: "This is a British bus and you can't do that" (89).

Gee extends the discussion to include different black and white voices that comment on the post-imperial state of London. It is ironic that Mary's Spanish friend Juanita, who she meets at a café in East London, "half-disapprovingly", notes that: "You Africans are taking over, in London" (*My Cleaner* 138). Her Ugandan friend, Abdu, also adds, a bit defensively, that there are "lots of Nigerians, Ghanaians" too (132). Observing the café in Dalston, Mary wisely asks: "Can this be London?" when only ten percent of people are *bazungu* (133). It seems that *My Driver*'s third person narrator provides an answer to this question to suggest Gee's affirmative "Yes":

This is London, after all; the city of plaiting and twining, throwing new ropes of life, in the instant of conception, across thousands of miles of the surface of the planet, across mountains and oceans that were once uncrossable, threading the blue air to their amazing destinations. Zakira is Moroccan, but born in England: Delorice is British, but her parents were Jamaicans and her distant ancestors were stolen from Ghana, [...] They have the world in common- Africa, Europe. (*MD* 152)

In *My Cleaner*, Gee figures Mary naively questioning how *civilised* people can be racist; she denounces racism by way of comparing the Ugandan to the English and states that: "I myself am not prejudiced. I learned this at Makerere [University] where everyone teaches that racism is bad. And the Bible says we are all God's children" (121). Putting it in such basic terms, Mary ironically implies that the "superior" English like Vanessa, who obtain academic degrees and have access to rich sources of knowledge, could not learn this plain truth any better than poor Ugandans. Zakira's remarks about white people also contribute to Gee's bitter critique of racism through a black voice; articulating the lack of convivial spaces where the black and white can live together as equals, she says: "People like [Vanessa] know nothing about us. They do not want to get to know us. [...] I think they are afraid of us" (*MC* 184). Since she knows that the terms of their relation to the English is by no means even, Mary believes that "the British will keep all the things that they have", but send her away (203).

My Driver reveals this racial tension through turning the tables on Vanessa and her ex-husband Trevor. Many years after her first stay in England, Mary is now the successful Executive Housekeeper of Kampala's Sheraton Hotel. Vanessa is invited to Uganda for an African writers' conference meaning to visit Mary as well, while Mary secretly summons

Trevor, a plumber, to build a new well in her home village. As they try hard to acclimatise, Mary ruminates on the treatment she received in England as a Ugandan woman. She remembers the sense of displacement she experienced there and feels very angry. Her deep-seated feelings of resentment surface when the villagers sing songs to thank Trevor for the well; she feels frustrated as she thinks that no one ever thanked her in England for any of the things she did as a cleaner:

Still it was good for Trevor to feel like me, when I was in my twenties, and first came to London, and cleaned their toilets and their offices. The English made me feel like an ignorant Ugandan. They thought I knew nothing, and understood nothing. No-one saw me, or valued me. The English did not value me, just because I was not born in their country. (*My Driver* 281)

Shedding light on forms of hostility between black and white, both *My Cleaner* and *My Driver* bring Mary's voice to the fore not only to comment on everyday racism in modern-day London, but also to criticise the colonial past and its remnants in the present post-imperial Britain and post-colonial Uganda. In *My Cleaner*, Mary reflects on the term "protectorate" the Empire used to justify its colonial rule in Uganda and reveals her bitterness about the fraudulent policies of the British as she questions, "Protecting us from what?" (17). As a response to this possessive behaviour of the English, Gee juxtaposes Mary's complaint that in Uganda it is only the *bazungu*, the white tourists, who can go on safari, and implies that they are not protected but simply colonised (*MC*, 90). She knows that Ugandans can go on safari only if they have a lot of money and free time for a holiday (91). Condemning the English tourists as lovers of animals more than people, Mary feels resentful and speaks in a possessive idiom similar to that of Vanessa:

It is our country; it does not belong to them, [...] They go on safari with polite black drivers. Without the drivers they would be too frightened (yet they think they own them: they always say 'my driver', 'Could you go and see if my driver is waiting?') (*My Cleaner* 91)

To develop Mary's critique of domineering white culture in Uganda, Maggie Gee also makes use of intertextuality in both *My Cleaner* and *My Driver*, and introduces more occasions for her black character to comment on. References to Winston Churchill's book *My African Journey* (1908), which describes Uganda as "the Pearl of Africa" function as a device to help Gee comment on colonialism through Mary's voice (*MC* 153). As Mary reads this English book, she finds Churchill's behaviour very funny because he is always saying "sorry"; she thinks that saying sorry all the time, "like most English people [...]" makes it impossible to know what they mean" (*MC* 285). Ironically, like most English people, Trevor who lends the book to Mary feels a bit shy and "sorry" about it because he understands that Churchill's description of the native people is too narrow. Re-reading it with mixed feelings, of pride and embarrassment, he sees colonialism with a critical eye: "Let us be sure that order and science will conquer, and that in the end John Bull will be really master in his curious garden of sunshine and deadly nightshade" (*MC* 169). As if to prepare the ground for the symbolic scene of reconciliation in *My Driver* in which Mary's ex-husband Trevor goes to Uganda to repair the well in Mary's village, Gee portrays Trevor pondering the idea of colonial pride. Considering some of Uganda's grave problems, he holds John Bull, the emblem of the English, in contempt and resents the fact Churchill failed in his aim to "master", let alone "civilise" Uganda through "order and science" (*MC*

169). Trevor's disillusionment about the influence of the English in Uganda contributes to the overall impact of Gee's criticism of colonial pride via her black character; he sourly notes that: "They've got AIDS, apparently, and old John Bull didn't even sort them out with clean water" (MC 170). As in *The White Family*, Gee seems to remind the melancholic mourners among her readers that today, the post-imperial and multicultural Britain does not offer any ground for the sort of patriotism that had fostered colonial fantasies.

My Driver makes a similar critique of ethnocentrism through a series of scenes in which Vanessa and Trevor confront some cultural challenges; as they explore Uganda and its culture, they gradually understand their misconceptions about it. Being English, they first see themselves as naturally superior. For instance, when the waiter brings her tea, not the English style black tea with cold milk, Vanessa explodes: "Why can't they ever get tea right?" (*My Driver* 131). Similarly, Trevor exposes his Eurocentric perspective as he thinks of his entry into Uganda as a fall from grace: "Bloody hell, I'm on the other side of the world. No, I've fallen off the edge of the world" (175).

Both to show and refute the inbuilt prejudices about the black people, Gee centrally employs the perspective of her black characters in *My Driver*. The opening scene, in which Vanessa converses with a Ugandan taxi driver on her way from the airport to the Sheraton, sets the novel's critical tone by the voice of the driver, Isaac. When Vanessa makes a comment on some Ugandan children off the road and says "I love your school uniforms, so smart," Isaac wittily responds: "Of course you like them, they are British," and starts telling Vanessa about life in Uganda (49). Though Isaac remains a minor character (unlike Mary, the ex-cleaner of *My Cleaner*, who has the claim to the title), the strong narrative voice endows him with the antagonistic position that the plot needs. It is mainly Mary who provides insight into how Uganda has been economically and culturally colonised, and how the Eurocentric worldview feeds white people's ignorance about life in Uganda. Referring to Churchill's opinion that "the black man did not like to work", Mary explains Trevor that "In fact [Ugandans] are working in the field all day. The people you see are waiting for lifts because their journey is too far to walk" (*My Driver* 147-8). As Vanessa thinks Uganda is a world of nothingness, Trevor mistakenly believes smoking to be a Ugandan habit. As in *My Cleaner*, Mary's corrective voice explains that the habit comes from the empire and, as the owner of all those tobacco companies, "the British manufacturers are killing Ugandans" (MD 143). In its criticism of the Eurocentric worldview through a scene in a Protestant school in a Ugandan village, the novel shows that all the students here are expected to speak English, and "the exams they must pass to go into their future" are in English too (164). Making Trevor find this natural, Gee, in fact, uses a strategy to condemn the deep-seated colonial impulse of the English. Symptomatic of his ethnocentrism, the first question he thinks of asking the Ugandan class is: "Where is London?" And later, as one of the pupils writes in reply the Ugandan word for England "Bungereza", Trevor takes it as an error and corrects by writing "ENGLAND" on the board. As if to illustrate that the English still have a sense of superiority, Gee figures Trevor musing: "Why don't they teach them English? Otherwise they can't communicate" (166). Showing how irrelevant his questions are, Gee implies that it is in fact the English Trevor who fails to communicate because he does not know even a word of Ugandan and does not bother to learn. It is again Mary's critical voice that strengthens Gee's exposition of Trevor's ignorance.

Both of the novels problematise the ignorance of Vanessa and Trevor about the Ugandan people, and I suggest that leaving some gaps and silences in her texts, Gee plays a trick and tests her reader's capacity to think beyond racial as well as sexual biases. For instance, *My Cleaner* exposes a different bias against the black people by suggesting that white people ignorantly equate blackness with sexual potency. Namely, Gee's use of the

phrase "some strange Ugandan habit" exposes a double joke about sexual stereotyping and racial prejudice. Vanessa uses this term to refer to the curious sound she hears from Mary's room. Since Vanessa's white imagination refuses a figure of the Ugandan Mary in the habit of writing, she cannot associate the sound with typing, thus failing to spot it, she links it to a "strange habit". Interestingly, the "strange Ugandan habit" calls to mind the newspaper jargon "Ugandan affairs"¹.

Associating the term "Ugandan affair" with Vanessa's remark about the curious sound from Mary's room, which she thinks can be the result of "some strange Ugandan habit", the reader can ask if Mary is having sex with Justin or it is just the table shaking as she types. Maggie Gee seems to allow this strange noise to arouse in the reader suspicions, which adds to a sense of ambiguity in the novel. Allowing for an investigation of the prejudices about the black, the novel shows Mary playing many different roles, which makes her more genuine and convincing. She is both a mere helping hand and a surrogate mother. She is a soother as well as an abuser. She focuses a bit too much on the money she will earn and makes the best of her time in London. However, at times, she sincerely worries about Justin's health and offers her love generously. She is presented as the x-cleaner as well as a promising writer. She is both a fierce rival and a reliable friend to Vanessa.

Part of the pleasure in reading these two novels relies on the richness of Gee's portrayal of Mary and the freedom she allows her reader/s to see Mary as a full-fledged character. The strength of Gee's *My Cleaner* and *My Driver* also lies in their stimulation of thought for imagining difference and envisioning a space for dialogue and understanding. Going beyond the established ways of thinking about differences, Mary becomes a model for this dialogue. Gee's representation of a black character interacting with a white one demonstrates that out of the conflict between two different cultures, a unifying perspective can still emerge. What Mary says about Vanessa near the end of *My Cleaner* underlines this potential. Reflecting upon her feelings about Vanessa, Mary observes that racial prejudices hinder love, and muses: "When we do not think, we like each other. And maybe thinking

¹ "Ugandan affairs" or "a Ugandan discussion" is a term which is used as a humorous synonym for illicit sex after an incident involving a Ugandan, namely Princess Elizabeth of Toro. She is a Ugandan politician, diplomat, model and actress, regarded as a living fairy tale princess. She was the first female East African to be admitted to the English Bar. She was also, the first female lawyer of Uganda, and the third African woman to graduate from Cambridge University. Elizabeth is not only a beautiful and intelligent princess but also a strong woman who tried to survive the endless political turmoil in Uganda. Being a celebrity and a public figure, she has also become a target of satirical magazines. *Private Eye*, the British satirical magazine, has used the term "Ugandan affairs" since she was said to be caught having sex in an airport toilet at London Heathrow Airport and claimed they were "discussing Ugandan affairs". During the time period in which she served as Idi Amin's Minister of Foreign Affairs, she rejected Amin's marriage proposal and showed too independent a line as ambassador to the United Nations. Thus, it is ambiguous if this "Ugandan affair" was a mere accusation by Idi Amin who wanted to denigrate her or she really had such an affair. There is one thing for sure: a Cambridge-educated lawyer, Elizabeth actually sued successfully and cleared her name. More about Elizabeth of Toro, Elizabeth Nyabongo, can be found in her two books, *African Princess: The Story of Elizabeth of Toro* (London: 1983) and *Elizabeth of Toro: The Odyssey of an African Princess* (Touchstone: 1989). Henry Kyemba also wrote about her in his *A State of Blood: The Inside Story of Idi Amin* (1977). "Meet H.R.H. Princess Elizabeth Bagaaya". <<http://www.torokingdom.org/Bagaaya.htm>>. 13 May 2010.

does not always matter" (333). Much as she remembers that the English made her "feel like an ignorant Ugandan" and did not value her "just because [she] was not born in their country" (*My Driver* 281), she can still be objective and confess that she can be racist too (*My Cleaner* 274).

To align her reader with Mary's viewpoint, Gee depicts her as objective enough to see her native land with a critical eye. She admits that many Ugandans in the village use cousins and aunts as slaves (*My Cleaner* 122). Her impartiality enables Mary to go beyond a skewed vision and relate to others with her fresh and unique observations. For instance, despite criticising Trevor's ethnocentric discourse, Mary can see him as a product of a colonial culture and says: "I cannot blame Trevor. He is a good man" (*My Driver* 281). It is this understanding voice that brings a reconciliation of the two antagonistic sides: Mary and Trevor. Gee creates a final scene in *My Driver*, in which Trevor is redeemed as he becomes a really good man in Uganda. While *My Cleaner* figures Trevor as Vanessa's weak ex-husband who cannot do anything other than fix sinks, *My Driver* crowns him as a hero, "The Fountain of Life" repairing the well in the village. To show their gratitude, the villagers celebrate him and even compose a song, "The Bringer of Water" (*MD* 199). Juxtaposed with the cold and unwelcoming Londoners of the two novels, the generous and appreciative villagers of Uganda here offer a more friendly space which can erase age-old prejudices.

Through portraying transnational encounters from a black critical perspective, *My Cleaner* and *My Driver* offer exercise in creating convivial spaces, or new grounds to see, understand, empathise and connect to the other. The final image of *My Cleaner* similarly describes a convivial space where conflicts of everyday racism are resolved; the scene that shows the antagonists, this time Mary and Vanessa, reflected in a fish-eye mirror becomes an emblem of the state of connectedness the whole body of Gee's writing suggests:

They are there, minute, in the bottom right corner, at the end of a road that slopes away into the distance, at one precise vortex of time and space, and the world is enormous, and they are tiny, and their ant-like bodies vibrate with the traffic, two small living things on an enormous planet, and Mary has crossed the earth to this place, and when she turns again, ten feet down the turning, the two of them merge into the same bright dot. (*MC* 254)

Gee proposes that poisoned by prejudice, thus often lacking in agency, both the white Vanessa and the black Mary, like many other people from different cultures, become victims of social incomprehension and that such antagonisms are merely signs of, to quote Fanon, "epidermalization of the binary thinking terms" (13). However, more significantly, the scenes of reconciliation in *My Cleaner* and *My Driver*, namely the resolution of conflicts between the novels' antagonistic forces, suggest that by not being blind to the stories told and sharing insight, we can go beyond the rigid categories of culture and race. Mary and Vanessa learn to love each other; Vanessa and Trevor unite, live and die together; Mary finds her lost son Jamil, thanks to Vanessa; Justin recovers and learns to see beyond himself; Vanessa understands and accepts her black daughter-in-law, Zakira who gives her a black grandson, Abdul Trevor. Both of the novels end on a note of optimism about future, the first with the news of a baby, Abdul Trevor and the latter with the idea of eternity: "And the stars shine on. The stars shine on" (*My Driver* 321). In his preface to *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon maintains that: "The future should be an edifice supported by living men. This structure is connected to the present to the extent that I consider the present in terms of something to be exceeded" (13). Representing black people interacting fully with the white

and assigning voice to them, Gee's novels can be regarded as attempts to mirror the problems of the present to exceed it and to build a better future. Thus, I argue that through giving voice to the black, Gee's *My Cleaner* and *My Driver* address transnational encounters and migration, in line with Ponzahesi's perspective, as sites "of transition and transformation between received and appropriated categories" that plays important roles in reshaping identities (219, 205). In these transnational novels, Gee as a white writer shifts her imaginative centre to represent and speak through the perspective of received and appropriated categories. As Mary becomes an agent for cultivating the ethical values which correspond to the egalitarian ideals of multicultural Britain, we receive a call to shift our imaginative centre too.

In conclusion, as she maintains in her essay "The Contemporary Writer: Gender and Genre", Gee sees herself as a writer using her dint of trade to go beyond boundary categories and give voice to different perspectives. With reference to Woolf, she defines her profession as a "woman novelist" and suggests that her trade makes new demands in our new times:

I hope we are slowly daring to emerge from the room of one's own that half a century ago was our boldest dream, and filling bigger, more populated spaces with our visions and voices. I hope some of those visions will show women and men able to realize all their different selves, crossing borders, shape lifting, blissfully transgressing, plural and playful. And I speculate that that kind of playfulness, that kind of manifold expression, is also a dissolving of the rigid, repetitive categories of hatred and violence. (1998, 178)

It is clear that by imagining convivial spaces with a more inclusive sense of belonging, Gee emerges from the room of her own and raises our hopes about the enormous potential that fiction has, to dissolve "the rigid, repetitive categories of hatred and violence". As a white British writer who is willing to imagine how it feels to be black in Britain, Gee makes a significant contribution to contemporary British fiction. If this paves the way for a new trend in British fiction to defeat the literary apartheid, it is not easy to assess until we have gained the distance of time. Let's hope and speculate that it does.

Works Cited

- Essed, Philomena. *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory*. Newbury Park: Sage, 1991.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1967.
- Gee, Maggie. *Where Are the Snows*. London: Heinemann, 1991.
- . *How May I Speak in my Own Voice?: Language and the Forbidden*, The William Matthews Lecture, 23 May 1996. London: Birkbeck College, 1996.
- . "The Contemporary Writer: Gender and Genre" in *Writing: A Woman's Business: Women, Writing and the Marketplace*. Judy Simons and Kate Fullbrook. eds. New York: Manchester UP, 1998.
- . *My Cleaner*. London: Saqi Books, 2005.
- . *My Driver*. London: Telegram Books, 2009a.
- . "A Different View". *Mslexia*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Mslexia Publications, 2009b.
- Gilroy, Paul. *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* London: Routledge, 2004.

- Jaggi, Maya. "Maggie Gee with Maya Jaggi (2002)" in *Writing Across Worlds: Contemporary Writers Talk*. Susheila Nasta. ed. London: Routledge, 2004. 301-314.
- Özyurt Kılıç, Mine. *Maggie Gee: Writing the Condition-of-England Novel*. London and New York: Bloomsbury/Continuum Literary Studies, 2013.
- Ponzanesi, Sandra. *Paradoxes of Post-colonial Culture: Contemporary Women Writers of the Indian and Afro-Italian Diaspora*. New York: SUNY Press, 2004.
- Thomas, Susie "Literary Apartheid in the Post-war London Novel: Finding the Middle Ground". *Changing English*. 12. 2 (August 2005): 309-325.

Özet

"Yazar Olmanın Bir Gereği Olarak Başkalarının Dünyalarını Hayal Etmek: Maggie Gee'nin My Cleaner ve My Driver Romanları

Bu makale Maggie Gee'nin birbirinin devamı niteliğinde yazılmış *My Cleaner* (2005) (*Temizlikçim*, Versus Kitap, 2007) ve *My Driver* (2009) adlı iki romanında da, başkarakterler Ugandalı Mary Tendo ve İngiliz Vanessa Henman arasındaki çelişkinin çağdaş Britanya'da gündelik yaşam alışkanlıklarına ve davranışlara sinmiş ırkçılığı ve ülke topraklarının gerçek sahibinin kim olduğuna ilişkin kaygıları betimleyen bir anlatı unsuru olarak kullanıldığını tartışmaktadır. Hem Mary'yi hem de Vanessa'yi okura nesnel bir biçimde sunan ve onları neredeyse eşit miktarda konuşuran bu iki roman, bir yandan siyahlar ve beyazlar arasında yaşanan ırksal gerilimlerin nedenlerini ortaya koyarken bir yandan da bu gerilimleri azaltmanın yollarını aramaktadır. Bu açıdan, makale Maggie Gee'nin beyaz bir yazar olarak siyah karakterier aracılığıyla ve onlar hakkında yazarken, edebiyatın farklılıkları anlayabilme ve daha kapsayıcı, açık ve dayanışmaya dayalı ortak yaşam alanları yaratma konusundaki potansiyeline vurgu yaptığını da ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Maggie Gee, *My Cleaner*, *My Driver*, gündelik yaşama sinmiş ırkçılık, siyah karakterler