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"The Truth lies in Black and White."
The Language of Truth and the Search for Coloured
Identity in Zoe Wicomb's *David's Story*

Fiona Mc CANN*

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article analyse la manière dont Zoe Wicomb explore les procédés de construction identitaire et les notions d'inaccessibilité et de multiplicité de la vérité. Ancré dans l'Afrique du Sud peu après la chute de l'apartheid, ce roman reflète les difficultés intrinsèques à un pays en pleine mutation et soulève des questions importantes quant à la (re)construction de l'identité. Par le biais de jeux narratifs et langagiers, Wicomb problématise la notion de vérité et, créant au sein de ce roman des relations intertextuelles avec des textes sud-africains et internationaux, interroge la notion de l'hybridité, proposant ainsi une vision anti-essentialiste de la "Nouvelle" Afrique du Sud.

Key Words: truth – identity – intertextuality – hybridity – language

David's Story, Wicomb's first novel and her second work of fiction, published thirteen years after her collection of short stories entitled *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, is set in South Africa in 1991 after the release of Mandela and at a time of momentous change in this country. Political parties were negotiating a democracy amidst immense tensions and an escalation in violence. While the overriding feelings at this time in the lead up to South Africa's first democratic elections were hope and excitement, this period was also marked by a good deal of uncertainty, both epistemological and ontological. By the time Wicomb was writing and publishing this novel, the ANC had successfully won two elections (in 1994 and 1999), but the euphoria had been replaced by a sense of disillusionment and uncertainty remained.

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, now renowned worldwide, took place between 1995 and 1998 and although Wicomb's novel does not explicitly deal with it (being predominantly set in 1991), the preponderance of truth within the novel is perhaps partly explained by this contextual information. Indeed, *David's Story* abounds in references to truth and the style of the narrative leads us to question the very nature of truth, its accessibility and multiplicity. David, a high-ranking member of MK (UmKhonto we Sizwe—Spear of the Nation) and the protagonist of the novel, has employed an amanuensis to write his story, but his

* Université de Caen.

reluctance to divulge any sensitive information (either about himself or Dulcie, a high-ranking comrade to whom he is attracted), added to the narrator's inventions, omissions and filling in of gaps, forces us to concentrate on the question of mediation and the problematic of our being privy to any truth regarding David. David's interest in his Griqua heritage at a time when the construction of national unity is the central focus raises interesting questions about identity and the wisdom of concentrating on a monolithic ethnic identity. Wicomb herself has commented in her critical writings on the "failure, in coloured terms, of the grand narrative of liberation," and points out the necessity of "fresh enquiry into the questions of postcolonial 'hybridity' and identity."¹

This paper will therefore concentrate firstly on the narrative techniques employed by Wicomb to undermine any claims to truth, before focussing on the ways in which Wicomb plays with language and points towards its fundamental instability as well as its inadequacy. The focus will then shift to Wicomb's extensive use of intertextuality which reveals something of the fallibility of the construction of a particular ethnic identity.

The preface to the novel (written by our unnamed narrator) opens with the following statement: "This is and is not David's story." This apparently contradictory statement sets the tone of the novel as a whole and undermines the title from the very beginning. The amenuensis goes on to explain why this is the case, pointing out that David has written some "fragments" of it, but that she has "fleshed out" the rest, and the anachronistic tone continues with her remark that, "he both wanted and did not want it to be written".² From the outset, then, we are forewarned that David's quest for truth is a veritable labyrinth, that this is a text which resists closure of any kind, and that we must be prepared to construct our own meaning from oblique clues, contradictions and ellipses.

Wicomb is overtly playing with narrative convention in her choice of narrator. The use of a first person narrator draws attention to inevitable subjectivity and possible unreliability. This narrator proves herself to be both subjective and unreliable and yet manages to congratulate herself on her use of postmodern conventions in the writing of David's story. In the preface we read, "I am, in a sense, grateful for the gaps, the ready-made absences, so that I do not have to invent them" (2) Wicomb here is drawing attention playfully to the way in which postmodernism "foregrounds and thus contests that assumption of seamlessness and asks its readers to question the process by which we represent our selves and our world to ourselves and to become aware of the means by which we make sense out of and construct order out of experience in our particular culture."³ At the same time, the narrator adds a disclaimer to this use of postmodern technique when she writes "I

¹ Zoe Wicomb "Shame and Identity: the case of the coloured in South Africa" Attridge and Jolly eds., *Writing South Africa—Literature, apartheid, and democracy, 1970-1995*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998: 94

² Zoe Wicomb, *David's Story* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2000:1. All further references will be to this edition)

³ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, (1989, London & New York: Routledge, 2002, 51).

take no responsibility for the fragmentary nature of this story" (2) and seems perturbed by the excess of rupture and lack of continuity in this story. However, as we shall see, while she might be exasperated with David's taciturnity, she too is responsible for "the fragmentary nature of this story." Let us take as an example her decision to omit the "starting point" of the story, which, according to David, begins with Eva/Krotoa. She admits that this is "the only section that [she has] left out" (1). Dorothy Driver, in her afterword in The Feminist Press edition of the novel, comments on the unreliability of this narrator: "Despite David's protests, the narrator leaves his story about Krotoa out of the text. She agrees to include his story about Saartje Baartman, but does not. And then she does not—untrustworthy indeed!—honour his request to remove references to his love for Dulcie."⁴ But it is not only omissions which draw our attention to the narrator's authority in this novel. She also asserts her authority through superfluous information and detail. Much later in the novel, when describing a meeting in Kokstad, the narrator makes the following remark: "That they ate dainty meat pies that had fluted edges and were garnished with sprigs of parsley, followed by delicious granadilla cake that must have taken hours to make, is a detail that he does not remember." (138) The narrator was not at this meeting and her knowledge of it is entirely dependent on David's account, so by adding details which are purely aesthetic and completely unnecessary, the narrator explicitly draws attention to her ultimate power and authority with a view to rendering obvious her role as mediator.

In allowing the narrator to draw attention so explicitly to her unreliability, Wicomb foregrounds the elusive nature of truth. We, David and even the narrator may be on a quest for truth but this quest is redundant, as Wicomb makes clear that there is no one truth and that truth itself may not even exist: "If there is such a thing as truth, he said, it has to be left to its own devices, find its own way." (2) The use of the conditional form here reinforces this doubt as to the existence of truth and reminds us that it is our task as readers to decipher the clues and fill in the blanks in order to make sense of this story.

But what should we make of the narrator's decision to omit the stories of Krotoa and Saartje Baartman? Especially since David remarks that excluding the piece on Baartman "would be like excluding history itself." (1) David himself suggests that he is a descendant of Krotoa, that she is linked to his Griqua heritage, just as he suggests that he is a descendant of Georges Cuvier, yet, we are never privy to how exactly he is linked to her. Surely in a novel so concerned with a quest for identity and ethnic heritage it is problematic to leave out two such important icons as Krotoa and Baartman. Krotoa, (subsequently renamed Eva by the Dutch) is the first Khoi woman represented in the writing of early Cape Dutch settlers. She was servant to the wife of Jan van Riebeeck, the governor of the Cape. She married a Danish explorer, Peter van Meerhoff, with whom she had four children, but when her husband died, her children were taken from her and she was banished to Robben Island where she later died of alcohol abuse. Saartje Baartman (1789-1815, 16), who lived a good century after Krotoa, was a young Khoi woman who was taken to

⁴ Dorothy Driver, "Afterword," *David's Story*, 230.

Europe and exposed in public as an ethnological museum object named the "Hottentot Venus." She died young, seemingly from alcohol abuse also, and her brain, skeleton and genital organs were conserved and exposed in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris up until the 1970s (some, including Wicomb herself, say the 1980s). In the 1990s, a series of negotiations culminated in Baartman's remains being returned to South Africa and after an intense debate as to where they should be laid to rest, were buried in the Gamtoos Valley of the Eastern Cape.⁵

By having her narrator omit and then admit to having deliberately omitted (for after all, had she said nothing, we would never have been the wiser) what David has to say about Krotoa and Baartman and how they are linked to his heritage, Wicomb draws attention not only to the role of mediation in this novel and our understanding of David and his story, but also to the role of mediation in the history of the indigenous populations (the Khoi and the San) of what is now South Africa and in the construction of identity. This is somewhat reinforced by David's suggestion that he is a descendant of Georges Cuvier. We learn from the narrator that:

the historical figure of Madame la Fleur was transformed into Cuvier's housekeeper, the good woman being lifted out of her period and grafted onto the wrong century. Charmed by the way in which one collapsing story would clutch at another in thin air, I suggest that, in spite of the error, we keep her after all. David giggles boyishly at the image of Madame la Fleur flitting between centuries (35)

Madame la Fleur, a French Huguenot, fled France in 1688, little under a century before Cuvier was in fact born, yet David and the narrator conspire to create a fictional link between the "father of biology" and Andrew le Fleur (sic.), who thus becomes Cuvier's (implied) great-grandson. Griqua identity is thus further hybridised and complicated by Wicomb while the text itself scornfully guards us against any interpretation: "But what, he asks, if a reader should try to find meaning in the historical disjuncture? Nonsense, I say, it's clearly an error." (35)

But what M.J. Daymond has called "postmodern playfulness"⁶ is not the only outcome of this narrative technique. As Daymond points out, it is precisely the uncertainties and omissions which give us an insight into and access to David's and the narrator's states of mind.⁷ It is also interesting to note that David's research, being focussed on the Griqua people, is situated in the realm of ethnicity and not racial category, which David too avoids using (200).⁸ Moreover, the use of shifting points of view (normally reserved for third person extra-diegetic narratives) within a first-person narrative which itself oscillates between the narrator and David and extracts from Andrew le Fleur's diaries (we are also privy to Ouma Sarie's, Sally's

⁵ For more information on these two women, see Kai Easton's article, "'Travelling through History', 'New' South African Icons: The narratives of Saartje Baartman and Krotoa-Eva in Zoe Wicomb's *David's Story*," *Kunapipi*, Volume XXIV, n° 1 & 2, 2002, 237-250.

⁶ M.J. Daymond, "Bodies of Writing: Recovering the Past in Zoe Wicomb's *David's Story* and Elleke Boehmer's *Bloodlines*," *Kunapipi*, Volume XXIV, n° 1 & 2, 2002, 29

⁷ M.J. Daymond, "Bodies of Writing," 29.

⁸ Wicomb has commented on nomenclature in relation to the coloured community in her article "Shame and identity," 93.

and Dulcie's points of view at different points in the novel), serves to reinforce the multiplicity of truths while voluntarily undercutting the very narrative itself. Wicomb cleverly leaves us with not much of a foothold and forces us to rethink our position as reader and interpreter, leaving us with a multitude of unanswered questions at the end of the novel: why does David kill himself? Is he one of Dulcie's torturers? Does he betray the Movement? What happened on the Sunday night in Kokstad which is unaccounted for? Has David been betrayed by his comrades?

Truth is therefore elusive in this novel, and yet, the word "truth" appears more than forty times, to mention nothing of the frequency of the adjective "true." Language is one of the means by which Wicomb plays with this notion as, although the word may recur frequently, it is usually with a view to calling the concept into question and to pointing to the general instability of language. David himself admits as much in the course of a discussion with the narrator about Dulcie: "Yes, he confesses, even if a full story were to be figured out by someone, it would be a story that cannot be told, that cannot be translated into words, into language we use for everyday matters." (151) Language is therefore insufficient, an inadequate tool for telling this particular story. And yet this story (if that is what we can call this fragmented account) finds its way onto a page, through the medium of language and this latter, while it may seem redundant to David at times, also holds a certain power, as we shall see.

Dulcie (if we are to believe our narrator) shares David's acknowledgement of the inadequacy of language: "She would like to believe that somewhere there are suitable words with which to say, to ask what she needs to know, to record what she thinks she knows." (198) While this statement shows her scepticism (and perhaps her wistfulness) as to the existence of an adequate language, we are left with no idea as to what she would like to use this language to say—"suitable words to say"—to say what? we are tempted to ask. What is implicit here is more the sheer impossibility of translating her feelings, which even she has difficulty fathoming, less than the failure of language to account for them.

But language is also invested with power for Dulcie: she has a "primitive fear that to speak of something will bring it into being, let loose the tokolos." (183) This superstition is shared by Ouma Sarie who says: "Saying is bad luck, makes unlikely things come true." (182) Language here is therefore imbued with a capacity not just to account for, "to say," but to create, to bring into being what was otherwise dormant. We can see in this a metaphor for the novel as a whole in that, although the protagonist emphasises the inadequacy of language, and refuses to reveal much about himself, what is written and what we read is enough to enable us to construct meaning—David's story is brought into being despite him we might say. However, for both Dulcie and Ouma Sarie, this power embedded within language is a source of ill luck. This is reinforced in David's own allusion to the hit list on which he finds his own and Dulcie's names as a "tokolos." (112) Indeed, for David, the discovery of his name on a hit list provokes a division within himself: "And so you are separated from yourself through reading your own name and wishing that you were not the signified, the bearer of that name." (112) Language here has the power to divide the subject—signified and signifier are pulled asunder.

Because David cannot seem to speak of Dulcie, and because the narrator wants clarification about his relationship (if that is what we can call it) with her, she asks him to write something down in order to "clarify what it is you want to say, bring to the surface things that you have not thought important, or simply have not remembered." (134) What he gives her (inadvertantly, we are led to believe) is:

a mess of scribbles and scoring out and doodling of peculiar figures that cannot be reproduced here. I know that it is his attempt at writing about Dulcie, because her name is written several times and struck out. Then there are beginnings scattered all over, and at various angles that ignore the rectangularity of the paper, as if by not starting at the top or not following the shape of the page he could fool himself that it is not a beginning.

This passage points to the absolute failure of language to convey anything coherent as far as David is concerned. Language here is reduced to chaos on this page, the only recognizable word being Dulcie, and even that has been crossed out and thereby cancelled. Language and even letters are revealed as inadequate means for David to express what he feels about Dulcie as the "doodling of peculiar figures" shows. Moreover, the "beginnings" referred to remain (as yet) unexplained and chaotic. David seems to have reverted here to infancy (*infans*) and to a pre-linguistic state as not only the lack of coherent language, but also the disorganised use made of space on the page reveal.

Truth, I gather, is the word that cannot be written. He has changed it into the palindrome of Cape Flats speech—TRURT, TRURT, TRURT, TRURT—the words speed across the page, driven as a toy car is driven by a child, with lips pouted and spit flying, wheels squealing around the Dulcie obstacles. He has, hauling up a half-remembered Latin lesson, tried to decline it.

trurt, oh trurt, of the trurt, to the trurt, trurt, by, with, from the trurt

[...]

There are all the symbols from the top row of the keyboard, from exclamation mark, ampersand, asterisk, through to the plus sign, then all are scored out. There is also a schoolboy's heart scribbled over, but not thoroughly enough to efface its asymmetrical lines.

TRURT ... TRURT ... TRURT ... TRURT ... the trurt in black and white ...
colouring the truth to say that ... which cannot be said the thing of no name ...
(136)

As this lengthy description reveals, David experiences immense difficulty in expressing his feelings through language (which renders his choice to work with an amenuensis clearer), but his obsession with truth has never been clearer, even if it is somewhat problematic. Once again, David seems to have entered a regressive state as the narrator's imaginative (and perhaps reductive) description of him shows, as does his transcription of the word truth in a dialectal form. By overtly comparing David to a child, the narrator reinforces her authority over this story and undermines

David. (We begin to wonder if the genitive case in the title is an indication that this is a story about David or a story belonging to him, or both.) His attempt to decline the word truth reinforces this regression, as does the "schoolboy's heart." The declination reveals an absence of any meaning—to avoid having to question the significance of this word, David pedantically copies it out. (Could this be a reminder of David's behaviour within the Movement, blindly following rules without questioning them?)

Furthermore, the presence of all the symbols of the keyboard is equally striking, all the more so as they are randomly written down, isolated and not associated with any words. These symbols are therefore devoid of any meaning, like the word truth. We are scarcely surprised that for David, truth is "the word that cannot be written," "the thing of no name" as all this scribbling seems to indicate just that, despite his numerous attempts. However, we notice that the word is spelt correctly once on this sheet which he has given the narrator—the phrase "colouring the truth" is therefore highly significant here, all the more so as it follows on from "the trurt in black and white." The extremely complicated relationship between truth and manichean oppositions is highlighted here and the link between truth and coloured identity is made explicit. It seems obvious that the truth proffered by "the struggle" needs to be nuanced in order to be able to come to an understanding of what remains unnameable for now. The play on words in the phrase "colouring the truth" seems to point towards David's own worries concerning the situation of coloured communities in a South Africa in the midst of monumental change and mutation. This expression also underscores the partisan nature of truth, as it is inevitably nuanced though each person's personal experience, and in South Africa, personal experience is often determined by the colour of one's skin.

The discovery by David of his name and Dulcie's on a hit list forces him to confront truth in its many different forms and raises a number of questions for him (and for us):

Can it be, he asks, can it be true that he does not know the truth? Or worse, that it stares him in the face, the truth which he cannot bear? And is truth not what he has been pursuing all these years of trouble and strife and dalliance with death—the grand struggle for freedom?

The repetition of the word truth three times in as many sentences is highly significant, as is the use of the interrogative form. The latter reveals David's disbelief and self-doubt concerning the Movement to which his entire adult life has been devoted and the fact that there are three questions in a row speaks volumes about the extent of David's confusion. It is interesting to note however, that truth appears here both with and without the definite article preceding it. While the use of the definite article is necessary in the second question, as it refers to a specific truth—in this case "the truth that he cannot bear," we might question why it is not used in the third and final question. It would seem that during the course of these three questions, David has moved from a concept of one monolithic truth—"the truth"—to a more general concept with implications for multiplicity—"truth."

However, even if the first question is attributed to David—"he says"—the voice of the narrator surfaces in the final question and is identifiable through her sarcasm: "all these years of trouble and strife and dalliance with death—the grand struggle for freedom." It is difficult to imagine David reducing his commitment to "the struggle" to "trouble and strife" as this use of cliché totally undermines the importance of his work within the Movement. Likewise, "dalliance with death" is more suggestive of a superficial and amateur game (and this is further reinforced by the alliterative 'd') than real danger. Equally, one cannot avoid hearing the biting sarcasm in the final few words of this question: "the grand struggle for freedom." What the narrator is clearly doing here then is undermining David's understanding of truth, while simultaneously manipulating the reader into questioning the ultimate "truth" of the "struggle for freedom." The narrator (and through her, Wicomb) then cleverly points towards the multiplicity of truth and calls into question the use of manichean opposites to create a given truth even within a movement created to fight for equality.

The links between truth and racial identity are rendered even more obvious (and complicated) in a remark made by David in the course of the same conversation: "the truth lies in black and white, unquestionably, in the struggle for freedom" (116). The fundamental ambiguity of this remark on several levels forces us to interrogate David's position here. Are we to understand "black and white" as manichean opposites, or print on a page? If we take these words on a literal level, are we to understand that David sees the struggle as being one of black against white? If this is the case, then where does this leave the coloured community? Where do they fit in? Given that those members of MK who were from the coloured community often referred to themselves often as "black," thus refusing apartheid nomenclature, this might not be so significant, but what then do we make of the extraordinarily ambiguous and oxymoronic "the truth lies?" While on one level we can take these words to mean that the "truth" of the struggle is the fight for equality and freedom for the oppressed majority of this country, on another, we can take them to mean that the manichean opposites of black and white exclude the coloured communities of South Africa and fail them somehow. The truth of the struggle is no longer relevant to them.

By using such an intrusive narrator and such ambiguous language, Wicomb playfully destabilises the reader in her/his own search for truth in this novel. However, her extensive use of intertextuality in this novel also contributes to this destabilising effect while pointing once more to the difficulties inherent in the (re)construction of a particular ethnic community.

In *David's Story*, Wicomb plays with intertextuality, both overtly and obliquely, in an attempt to provide what John Thieme calls in reference to Rushdie's India, "an anti-essentialist view" of South African culture.⁹ This "anti-essentialist view" stems largely from the fact that Wicomb uses both South African and international texts as

⁹ John Thieme, "Introduction: Parents, Bastards and Orphans," *Postcolonial Con-Texts*, (London and New York: Arnold, 2001) 1-11.

the basis for her intertextuality and these "hypotexts,"¹⁰ to use Genette's term, are both fictional and critical. This in turn creates what Thieme calls (again, in relation to Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*) "a metafictional dimension: it relates to the text's practice of constructing its own literary genealogy from a multiplicity of sources."¹¹

Wicomb draws attention to the genealogy of this story throughout the novel, particularly in the following remark made by the narrator: "When I suggest a pseudonym, he looks scornful and says no, not that he wishes to be naive about the truth, but he does want his own story told, wants to acknowledge and maintain control over his progeny even if it is fathered from a distance." (140) We are drawn back to the questions of truth and of narratorial reliability here, as we must wonder to what extent David exerts any control over this story of his in the light of the comments already made about the narrator's choices and decisions, and given that this story never receives David's approval as he commits suicide before it is completed. Therefore we are left with a sense that David's "progeny" ultimately escapes him and this is merely reinforced by the extensive use of intertextuality in the novel. Incidentally, it also escapes the narrator, whose computer is destroyed by a bullet at the end of the novel: "I shriek as a bullet explodes into the back of the computer. Its memory leaks a silver puddle onto the desk, and the shrapnel of sorry words scuttle out, leaving behind whole syllables that tangle promiscuously with strange stems, strange prefixes, producing impossible hybrids that scramble my story." (212) Quite apart from pointing once more to the inadequacy and indeed failure of language, this passage emphasises the "impossible hybrids" inherent in this story: linguistic, structural and intertextual. The repetitive alliterative sibilants seem, on the other hand, to point towards a fluidity within these "impossible hybrids" and to their ultimate (harmonious?) cohabitation.

It would be impossible within the confines of this article to enumerate all the hypotexts with which Wicomb's novel establishes an intertextual relationship, so this article will limit itself to a discussion of Joyce's *Ulysses*, the collective fiction of Nadine Gordimer, the critical work of Homi Bhaba, and Wicomb's own critical writings.¹² For the purposes of clarity, we will firstly concentrate on the fictional hypotexts, before concentrating on the critical ones.

The allusion to Joyce is short, yet significant:

... I shriek as I remember. Youth Day—Soweto Day, the sixteenth of June—that's also Joyce's Bloomsday, I gabble excitedly, Day of the Revolution of the Word. Imagine, black children revolting against Afrikaans, the language of oppressors on the very anniversary of the day that Leopold Bloom started with a hearty breakfast, eating

¹⁰ Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes*, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1982).

¹¹ John Thieme, "Introduction."

¹² Another extremely important hypotext is Sarah Gertrude Millin's *God's Step-children*. The overt intertextual relationship between this text and *David's Story* has been documented in detail by Dorothy Driver in her afterword to The Feminist Press edition of the novel, and therefore will not be dealt with here.

with relish the inner organs of. David grimaces, shakes his head, interrupts: Don't, that's horrible. What on earth are you talking about, eating a man's organs?

Not a man's; the inner organs of an animal. Oh, forget it, I say, just another coincidence. But wasn't that also the day you met Dulcie, in the Soweto Day celebrations?

Yes, yes of course, he says, but what's that got to do with your Mr. Blooms? (35)

The narrator is overtly creating a parallel between the Soweto Uprising of June 1976 (since the end of apartheid commemorated every year on June 16th) and Joyce's *Ulysses*. Apart from the obvious joy the narrator experiences at the discovery of this coincidence, (the 16th June 1904 and the 16th June 1976 were both "Revolutions of the Word" in a manner of speaking), this particular use of intertextuality raises questions about the issue of reception. David's rather gross misinterpretation of the narrator's words and his assumption that the unknown Bloom is eating human organs, reveals the limits of his knowledge of Western canonical texts, and this is reinforced by his final question, "what's that got to do with your Mr. Blooms?"

A discrepancy is therefore established here between the narrator's and David's (and, by implication, the reader's) knowledge of classical Western texts. We might wonder why the narrator has decided to include this passage—is it to underline David's ignorance, or to enhance and strengthen her own position as narrator in control of this story? We might also wonder who the implied reader of this novel is—South African or European/American? The narrator's near exact quotation of the opening of the Calypso section of *Ulysses* is in fact ultimately undermined by David's reaction, as the answer to his final question is "nothing." The coincidence exists only for the narrator and bears no meaning for David. In David's quest for truth and his interrogation of his ethnic identity, Joyce is neither here nor there. The narrator's postcolonial technique of using intertextuality backfires at David's reaction and Wicomb calls into question the use of this strategy.

The somewhat oblique intertextual allusion to Nadine Gordimer's fiction also ties in with Wicomb's own critical writings and her reactions to Homi Bhaba's work on hybridity. Sally, David's wife is reading but:

she soon shuts the book in irritation. She has had enough of the bodies of black women: their good thick legs, their friendly high-riding backsides, their great sturdy hams. And if not about unwieldy black behinds, there is always something to be read about the tragedy of being coloured and therefore, it would appear, in limbo. (117)

Wicomb uses intertextuality here to focus on the question of coloured identity. The relationship in this instance is more of a metatextual one (to use Genette's terminology again) as Wicomb, through Sally, refers to her own criticisms of Gordimer's fiction and Bhaba's critical writings. In her essay, "Shame and Identity," she makes the following remark: "Gordimer, who is admirably free of the postmodern anxiety about representation ... has never missed a chance to comment on the good, strong legs or large buttocks of black female characters" (103). The

rather acerbic (and humorous) comment about Gordimer's freedom from the "postmodern anxiety of representation" draws attention to Wicomb's own preoccupation with the politics of representation and to the necessity of either avoiding stereotype or using it in order to expose it from all sides. Sally's irritation mirrors Wicomb's own and all the positive adjectives in the above quotation are to be read in the light of Sally's overtly sarcastic tone, signalled by her "irritation." Concerning the metatextual allusion to Bhaba's "theorizing of the coloured,"¹³ Wicomb, in the same article, points out that his theory "takes its cue from the notion of fragmentation" (101). Quoting from *The Location of Culture*, Wicomb refers to Bhaba's "ontological leap ...so that the 'borderline existence' for the coloured marks a 'deeper historical displacement' and represents a 'hybridity, a difference 'within' a subject that inhabits the rim of an inbetween reality'" (101). Again, the intertextual reference is clear. Wicomb, in her article continues:

Here, surely, are echoes of the tragic mode where lived experience is displaced by an aesthetics of theory. How, one is tempted to ask, do people who live in communities inhabit, spookily and precariously, a rim of inbetween reality? Symbolically, of course, and therefore, according to Gordimer, in silence, the shame of it all encoded in the word *taboo*. Surely relegation to such a space relies on an essentialist view which 'posits' a pure reality that is experienced in the space inhabited by the racially pure. (102-3)

Sally's thoughts once again echo Wicomb's as the crossover of vocabulary ("tragedy," "limbo," "inbetween reality") reinforces. It is clear that Wicomb is arguing for a less essentialist view of hybridity and identity, and this is what she foregrounds in *David's Story*. In allowing her protagonist, in the process of his research into his ethnic heritage, discover and play with hybridisation of the Griqua people, Wicomb complicates the issue of coloured identity. Furthermore, through her use of diverse intertextualities, with hypotexts which are both South African and international, she hybridises her own text, thus escaping the trap of essentialism on all sides.

To conclude, then, in her novel *David's Story*, Zoe Wicomb seems to foreground divergence rather than convergence on several levels. Her emphasis on multiplicity of truths, on multiple narrators and points of view, her playfulness with and use of deliberately ambiguous language and her direct and oblique intertextual quotations and allusions all underline her desire to short circuit any essentialism and to call into question "the grand narrative of liberation" in South Africa. The construction or search for identity is unarguably difficult in the new "Rainbow Nation" and Wicomb guards us against falling into the trap of oversimplification, preferring instead to bring into the spotlight the "impossible hybrids" that make up this nation.

¹³ Homi K. Bhaba, *The Location of Culture*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1994.)