

Positioning the Reader in Post-apartheid Literature of Trauma:***I and you in Zoë Wicomb's David's Story*****Andrea Macrae****4.1. Introduction**

This chapter investigates the interpretative significance of the pronouns *I* and *you* in Zoë Wicomb's novel *David's Story* (2001). I explore the ways Wicomb uses these pronouns to create a complex reading experience which evokes reflection on one's own agency and complicity within colonial and postcolonial oppression and trauma. The novel presents the narrator's telling of the story of David, a Griqua resistance fighter troubled by his racial status at the end of apartheid, seeking reassurance via exploration of his ancestral roots and racial identity in the writing of his biography. Central to the novel's historiographic theme is David's reluctance to acknowledge the significance of his comrade and lover, Dulcie, to his story and to the dawn of the New South Africa. The narrative revolves around the self-conscious struggle of the unnamed female narrator, as amanuensis and fictive author of the text, to recover the trace of Dulcie from David's words, to "patch together" (2001: 78) a character and return her to the text, without becoming complicit in further suppression and deferral of the 'reality' of Dulcie.

Wicomb's text is a historiographic, archival endeavour, which is deeply rooted in, but goes beyond, the context of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. The recuperative portrayal of Dulcie addresses the silencing of intersectional trauma – unspoken misogynist

and racial violence inflicted upon women – here in the context of racial oppression and guerrilla warfare. The novel is also overtly self-reflexive, regularly confronting the act of authorship and the responsibility of imaginative representation. Most critics have investigated the ways in which the historiographic and metafictional strands are strategically intertwined to address the ethical tension in the entangled relationships between representation and subjugation, between recuperation and violation, and between inscription and erasure in the context of the post-apartheid novel (c.f. Attridge 2005; Baiada 2008; Coetzee 2010; Daymond 2002; Driver 2001, 2010; Robolin 2006; Samuelson 2007; van der Vlies 2010).

These issues have primarily been explored in relation to the role and responsibility of the authorial figure, specifically. However, as Driver (2010) notes, in both her critical and creative practice Wicomb advocates a model of reading in which the reader follows the signposts the text provides to tease out its own internal contradictions and paradoxes, to perform a readerly intervention which “penetrates and unsettles the authority of the text” (Driver 2010: 524). Attwell and Easton write that Wicomb’s work “sustains a productive dialogue between the practices of fiction and literary theory – theory drawn from the major movements of structuralism and poststructuralism, certainly, but also from the applied linguistics that Wicomb has studied and taught in the course of her academic life. Her writing is especially sensitive to the grammar of person, to positionality and modes of address” (2010: 520). I argue that it is specifically Wicomb’s manipulation of person, positionality and address that is the textual force behind the historiography, metafictionality and unsettled authority of the text, and that the role and responsibility of the reader, specifically, in relation to that positioning, is central to the text’s concerns.

This manipulation of person and positionality is manifest in the instability of the novel’s *I*. The *I*-narration is predominantly anchored with the pseudo-authorial narrator. The narrative moves away from the primary perspective of the narrator, however, when focalising the story

through other characters in passages comprised largely of free indirect thought (FIT). The experiences and feelings of David's wife, Sally, and his mother-in-law, Ouma Sarie, are mostly presented through their idiosyncratic manners of expression, as if in their own voices, seemingly in the style of free direct thought (FDT). There are, however, occasional nominal or third-person references to them, which re-anchor the locus of focalisation out of the viewpoint of the characters and back to the narrator's position. While this focalising practice isn't unusual, it does, in this context, contribute to the impression of the motility of the narrative voice, and, as will be discussed below (section 3), to the text's problematisation of authorship, authenticity and representation. Additionally, the absence of quotations marks throughout the novel makes it difficult for the reader to identify the focaliser, identify speech, attribute speech to a speaker, and so identify the referents of pronouns *within* speech. Furthermore, occasionally the narrative mode shifts to second-person narration. The continual slippage and confusion of pronoun reference perpetually disorients and shifts the reader in her relation to the text, the characters and the story.

This chapter firstly investigates the autofictional and metafictional aspects of the narratorial *I* and the ways in which the narrator explicitly brings both the story, and the act and responsibility for creation of the story, into question. I then explore how the free indirect thought and free direct speech impacts on the reader's ability to track pronoun reference, and the ways this contributes to the problematisation of the reader's relation to the text. The second half of the chapter analyses passages of second-person narration, and the way this deictic positioning implicates the reader in certain behaviours and roles. The chapter argues that it is this slippage of pronoun reference and roles – of person and position – which creates the self-conscious authorial and moral struggle of the text; which withholds cohesion and closure, withholds moral authority, and implicates both writer and reader as agents bound up in the ethical paradox of representation. It is this struggle and slippage which make the text, in

the words of Attridge, “one of the most original, powerful and important South African novels of the post-apartheid era” (2005: 160).

4.2. The Autofictional and Metanarrational I

From the outset, *David's Story* explores issues of ‘who speaks’, and the complexities of elision, recuperation and responsibility involved in authorship and narrativisation. The title establishes the story as David’s, yet the narrator’s opening words, within her ‘Preface’, are “This is and is not David’s story. [...] He has [...] written some fragments [...] all of which I have managed to include one way or another – but he was unwilling or unable to flesh out the narrative” (2001: 1). This tension over who owns, constructs and determines the narrative – David or the narrator - runs throughout the novel. The narrator reports David’s occasional editorial demands, such as the instruction, at one point, that all references to a special relationship between himself and Dulcie be removed (137). He intermittently “wants to acknowledge and maintain control over his progeny even if it is fathered from a distance” (140). However, the narrator also tells us that David often takes only a cursory glance over her drafts (140), and that he wanted someone else to write his story partially so that “it would no longer belong to him” (1). Each gesture he makes to disown the text places the story more firmly into the narrator’s hands, and at a further remove from verifiable ‘fact’ within this fictional world. His ambivalence over the text undermines the truth and reliability of these kinds of biographical discourses that lie at the source of History, and leaves the reader uncertain of the nature of the text she is reading.

The narrator’s relationship to the story is equally, if differently, problematic. The ‘Preface’ is the first of many ways in which the text exhibits the characteristics of autofiction

(Gibbons, this volume). Though the narrator is unnamed, she is a female writer of Griqua descent, just like Wicomb. The narration involves implicit and explicit direct address to the reader, including rhetorical questions, such as “Who, dear reader, would have the patience with this kind of thing?” (136), and passages of second-person narration (see sections 4 and 5). The title *David’s Story* encapsulates the novel’s self-reflexive positioning at the boundary between the real (a biography) and the fictional (a story). The text incorporates newspaper articles (61, 77, 151), diaries (41) and other historical texts (32, 34), extracts from other fictional and non-fictional works within epigraphs, and multiple references to Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) in particular (e.g. 19, 199).

The first-person narration conflates the narrative level of the telling and that of the story told, so that the discourse of the book *David’s Story* becomes the telling of the creation of David’s story. The narrator asserts editorial privileges, forewarning the reader, for example, “I took liberties with the text and revised considerably some sections that [David] had [...] approved”, under pressure from “an anxious publisher” (3). A significant proportion of the text is metanarrative commentary on the process of narrativising David’s story, such as “This is no place to start. But let us not claim a beginning for this mixed-up tale” (8-9), and “although I have made numerous inferences from that last page [of David’s notes], I do not quite know how to represent it” (135). The narrator openly falters in her role, admitting “This is [...] a weight that I cannot carry. That no amanuensis should have to carry” (151), later saying “I know longer know which story I am trying to write” (201), and finally “I do not acknowledge this scrambled thing as mine.” (213) These metanarrative comments give the impression that the *I*-narrator is the real author, and in turn strengthen the impression of David as equally real.

The narrative *I* is, nonetheless, a textual construct. The encouraged superimposition of Wicomb onto the *I* is a false, illusory identification. Though strengthening the illusion of the

reality of *I* in some ways, the metanarrative commentary also, paradoxically, work to expose this illusion, pushing the ontological status of the text and its narrator further into fictionality. For example, in the last pages of her narration, the narrator not only disowns her text, but sees it disappear before her. She finds that sections have been mysteriously deleted from her screen (211) and ultimately witnesses it being more permanently and violently destroyed, telling us “I shriek as a bullet explodes into the back of the computer. Its memory leaks in a silver puddle onto the desk, and the shrapnel of sorry words scuttle out. [...] The words escape me” (211-2). However, the physical reality of the text the reader is reading when encountering these pages testifies to the ‘survival’ of the story. This undermines the direct association between the “sorry words” referred to and the words being read, reaffirming the fictionality of the discourse of the text, and in turn the fictionality of its central voice, the *I*-narrator.

4.3. Disorienting Free Forms: Free Indirect Thought and Free Direct Speech

The problematisation of the *I* reaches its climax at the close of the novel. However, the positioning of the narrative viewpoint shifts and turns in other ways throughout the text, creating other ontological tensions. The narrative is dominated by first-person narration in which the narrator relays to the reader her conversations with David. Intermingled with this direct disclosure, though, are many sections of third-person narration, including a historical narrative and intermittent foci on events in the lives of Ouma Sarie, Sally and David. These sections frequently slip, without signal, from third-person narrative description into free indirect thought (FIT) focalising through the viewpoint of the character. The unsignalled transitions obstruct the reader’s comprehension, pronoun attribution and positioning. The FIT

also arguably involves free *direct* elements, confusing things further. Leech and Short (2007: 270-1) give the following examples to illustrate of the characteristics of FDT and FIT:

Does she still love me? (FDT)

Did she still love him? (FIT)

Both modes present the character's thoughts 'verbatim' – in their own manner of expression. Both lack a reporting clause (e.g. 'He wondered') and quotation marks. The key distinction in moving from FDT to FIT is the backshift in tense and the shift from first to third person. As both of these features are also traits of third-person past tense narration, within third-person past tense narration it is often only idiosyncrasies of expression which allow readers to distinguish between a narrator's thoughts and FIT expressing the thoughts of a character. The reader must do careful inferencing work to attribute the thoughts to a particular character with any confidence. Furthermore, although when focalising through characters such as Sally and Ouma Sarie the narrative stays in the third person (referring to them from the narrator's position, as 'she' or by name), the other conventional feature of FIT, the backshifted tense, is not always present. This can have implications for the reader's ability to follow the focalisation and reference.

The novel opens with an instance of precisely this confusion of focalisation, beginning (after the preface) with narration focalised through Ouma Sarie (5):

Ouma Sarie has hobbled down the hill bold as you please, [...] but the world had changed, it was mos the New South Africa, and she'd just ask, just say plainly, Listen, I hear you people put in a new foyer, jazzed up the whole place [...], and I've come to have a look. This is also my place: for fifty years I worked here in this Grand Logan Hotel, [...] not a single day off and all the girls under me just so sharp-sharp. And scraping together her palms in a dry rustle by way of showing the sharpness of her girls, that's just what she said to the woman with the cropped blonde hair. Which is now something, 'cause how often do you think you're going to say one thing and it comes out the other side as something quite different [...] The woman said politely, You go ahead Mrs. Meintjies, and we shall be most interested to hear your verdict on the blah blah big-words. Still very nice she was, and left Ouma Sarie in the hallway to inspect at her leisure the renovations [...].

The text quickly shifts into FIT, almost immediately involving a section of *hypothetical free direct speech* (FDS), beginning “Listen”. Reporting clauses, “she’d just ask, just ask plainly,” introduce the speech, and the person deixis within the speech is anchored with Ouma Sarie, i.e. her first-person reference to herself and second-person address, “you people”. The following third-person references to “her palms” and “her girls” signal a shift back out of FDS to narratorial focalisation again. The words introduced initially as what Ouma Sarie *would* “just ask”, are later revealed to be what she then *did* say, prompting some revision of their ontological status within the storyworld. From Sarie’s spoken words, the reader can then perceive her style of expression (most notably her dialect and style of metaphors). This enables readers to infer that similar expressions in the surrounding narration are also likely to be presentation of her thinking, rather than the narrator’s.

The text then moves into a conversational present tense style (with “Which is now something”), and asks a rhetorical question (“how often do you think...”), referring to a general “you” (this “you” being presumably in relation to Ouma Sarie’s speaking *I*, rather than the narrator). Interestingly, the second instance of speech seems to ‘slip’ modes (Leech and Short 2007: 272). It starts as FDS, clearly signalled with an introductory reporting clause, “The woman said politely”, then, (like Ouma Sarie’s speech,) begins with a capitalised word, and the words are reported seemingly verbatim. Half way through the sentence, though, the presentation slips out of the woman’s speech in FDS and into Ouma Sarie’s paraphrase in FIT, with “blah blah big-words” ending the sentence. The unmarked transition wrong-foots the reader’s tracking of voices, and reveals, on this opening page, that the usual signals and arrangements of positionality cannot be relied upon in this text.

The slippage between third-person narration and a mix of FDS and FIT (with elements of FDT) disorients the reader, shifting her back and forth between an observing focal point outside of the storyworld character, potentially from a narrative level ontologically ‘higher’,

and a focal point inside the character's consciousness. FDS and FIT can work to create rich characterisation and the mimetic illusion of a fully-fledged 'real' person. However, the narrator later dismantles reader's suspension of disbelief regarding the character of Ouma Sarie. The narrator begins what she introduces as an "imitation of Ouma Sarie" (202), seemingly in spoken reply to David. However, this "imitation" develops into a passage of narration almost a page in length in exactly the style which we have previously read and been taught to recognise as Ouma Sarie's expression. This narration trails off with an ellipsis when, we are told, "David interrupts with a clearing of the throat. Okay, he says, that will do for the mother-in-law-jokes. How are you getting on with Dulcie?" (203). At this juncture, late in the novel, the voice of Ouma Sarie is revealed to have been the narrator's invention. This serves to expose the fictionality of that character (and suggests the fictionality of other similarly voiced characters – it is not insignificant that David mentions Dulcie), to strengthen the impression of David and the narrator as real in contrast, and to add to the portrayal of the narrator as author.

On several occasions, new sections (following a line break) open with this kind of confusing mix of FDS and FIT. The new section involves the voices of characters different to those in the preceding section, yet gives no signal of the shift in context. For example, following on from a section in which the narrator has been describing Dulcie, after a line break, the new section begins (19-20):

A windbroek, that's what you are, what you've always been, that's why you mess around with kaffirs, his father shouted, taken in by kaffir talk.

He had had enough of the fellow's stubbornness, his madness, really. God had seen fit to bless him with one son only, a son who has since turned out to be no blessing at all. A moffie and a windbroek.

David patted his trousers foolishly as if to beat down pockets of air that turned him into a windbroek.

The reader has to try to ascertain, with every clause, whether the phrasing is more likely to be that of the narrator-character or that of another character, and, if it is more likely to be another

character's voice, whether the words are speech or a mix of FDT and FIT. In this extract, only once the reader reaches "his father shouted" will she most likely retrospectively identify the preceding words as speech, and only by the repetition of 'kaffir' is she able to infer that the words following the reporting clause are likely to be a continuation of that speech. The next line opens with "He", but the referent is initially unclear, and "the fellow" offers no deictic relation and therefore no resolution. The references to a "son" in the following sentence, though, allow the reader to infer that the "he" being referred to at this point is the "father" mentioned in the first sentence. The pattern of insults suggests that these three sentences are likely to be FIT, focalising through the father's perspective, but for the third-person references to the father himself from the narrator's position. Only in the last sentence is David revealed to be the 'windbroek' in question, the speaker revealed to be *his* father, and the relevance to the story made clearer.

This use of *you* in these already deictically ambiguous section-openings (e.g. 181, 199) adds to the reader's disorientation. The cues that the reader needs in order to identify words as the storyworld-internal speech of one character addressing another, rather than the narrator directly addressing the reader, are often withheld a little. This withholding lasts just long enough for the reader to experience a confronting jolt of momentary identification with the position of the *you*-addressee. There are several other uses of *you* in the text which cannot be ultimately resolved as character-address, where the reader's position as the *you*-addressee is less fleeting and more troubling. These uses of *you* are the focus of the rest of this chapter.

4.4. *You* and Dulcie

The figuring forth of Dulcie constitutes the central problematic paradox within the narrator's task, and one in which she involves *you*. Just over halfway through the text, the narrator explicitly asks David "how does the truth relate to the gaps in the story?", to which he just "shakes his head" (140). The narrator only "overstep[s] the role of amanuensis" (141) in her attempts to tease out and present more of the truth hidden behind his words, the hiddenness exposed precisely by these gaps in his discourse. Just as she notes and includes David's self-authored "few introductory paragraphs to sections," (1), so too does she note and include "the gaps, the ready-made absences", for which, she admits, she is, "in a sense, grateful [...] so that [she does] not have to invent them" (2). It is these gaps which provide the narrator with signposts to some truth in the text, and give her space to read and write – to co-construct – its potential meanings. The gaps David leaves require her to creatively flesh them out herself to reach for some sort of sense. The narrator's writing process, though, provides a model of reading: her reading of David's story, to produce *David's Story*, mirrors the co-constructive imaginative engagement she elicits from the reader, as her addressee, in reading and trying to make sense of the novel. It is in the co-realisation and inscription of Dulcie, and its ethical entailments, that the narrator most explicitly involves the reader as *you*.

David and his amanuensis both perform elision and inscription of Dulcie, but in different ways, and with different ethical consequences. David offers inferences about Dulcie, only to disown them. Exasperated, the narrator exclaims (78, 80):

Dulcie is surrounded by a mystique that I am determined to crush with facts [...] necessary details from which to patch together a character [...] But David will not answer such questions [...] Her story is of no relevance to his own, he says weakly, but he has betrayed the belief that some trace of hers is needed for his to make sense; he has already betrayed the desire to lose her story within his. So I persist. [...] Since there is little to go by other than disconnected images [...] I must put things together as best I can, invent [...].

The narrator, in the way she approaches reading into David's story, becomes the *writer* of *David's Story*, the status of which – as fact (within the world of the story) or fiction – is thus

explicitly problematised. Though she repeatedly decides she must continue – that, one way or another, Dulcie needs to be heard – her self-reflexivity in the act of invention makes overt, and leaves unresolved, the postcolonial anxiety of speaking for the silenced. Dulcie embodies the problems of re-presentation of real sexual subjugation and historical erasure. Whilst training to fight as a guerrilla against apartheid, Dulcie, like David’s wife, Sally, was raped by senior comrades, who portrayed the act as part of the conditioning for warfare. Further to rape, Dulcie suffers sexual torture, also at the hands of comrades, towards the end of apartheid. Though the causal connection goes unacknowledged by David, in his refusal to acknowledge her suffering, he does find himself revealing the reasons: “she’s grown too big for her boots and they’ve had enough of her. She must give up her power, hand over her uniform, make way for the big men. But this is not enough. She knows too much; [...] She must – and he stops abruptly,” the narrator reports (204).

The real historical basis of the text here is stressed by Driver, in her afterword to the novel’s US edition, in which she cites evidence of the enactment and the censure of sexual abuse in military training (2001: 239). Robolin (2006) corroborates, drawing attention to the extent of and political drives behind the censure, discussing President Mbeki’s move “to strike from the public record the disturbing details of the ANC camps” (313). The New South Africa prioritised racial harmony over a more open and nuanced acknowledgement of the racial and also class- and gender-based violence committed during apartheid. A ‘Special Hearing on Women’ within the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was latterly campaigned for in response to the silencing of reports of gender-based violence within the commission’s work (Deb 2009; Schaffer and Smith 2004). The TRC report for the hearing (1998: 297) states:

President Thabo Mbeki acknowledged that men in the camps had committed “gender-specific offences” against their woman comrades. He said that the perpetrators had been punished, but did not describe either the offences or the punishment in any detail. In the

light of these silences, Commissioner Hlengiwe Mkhize remarked that ‘the submission fail(ed) women’.

Driver reports that “few women, and no active female combatants, came forth to testify” to the TRC, and that Seroke, a TRC Commissioner and also chair of the Commission for Gender Equality in South Africa, said of these hearings that, although there were several “gruesome stories of sexual torture and violence”, the hearings “only began to scratch the surface” of the horror (2001: 239). Graybill discusses the blackmail of women combatants who did try to testify to being sexually tortured by male comrades, torture including being “made to disrobe in front of male warders, [and] fondled by doctors and police officers who proceeded to apply electric shocks to their nipples and vaginas” (2002: 105).

Driver also writes of the reality of “a partial prototype” for Dulcie, an ANC activist called “Dulcie September, [...] whose murder [...] still remains officially unresolved” (2001: 252). The potentially real basis of the character of Dulcie intensifies the ethical ramifications of narrative portrayal. As these critics recognise, Dulcie’s fictional figuration is not only necessarily overwhelmed by symbolic potential, but a direct deferral of the real, a *distancing* of authenticity, the subject inevitably reduced, replaced, and erased. Wicomb’s novel confronts how far such representation can engage with and challenge the master narrative of cultural memory whilst resisting further repetition of the elision of the voice needing and deserving to be heard.

In the attempt to re-inscribe the flesh, the body, of Dulcie into the text, the narrator must re-inscribe the torture inflicted upon her body. Higgins and Silver (1991) discuss the process of recuperating and reinscribing – “rereading” - rape into narratives in which it has been silenced, left out and made “unreadable” (3). They assert, “the act of rereading rape involves more than listening to silences; it requires restoring rape to the literal, to the body: restoring [...] the physical, sexual violation. [...] [It] necessitates a conscious critical act of reading the violence and the sexuality back into texts where it has been deflected, either by the text itself

or by the critics” (4). The narrator re-inscribes the violation into David’s text and this act of re-inscription both others and subjugates Dulcie. The torture described is not rape, for, as her torturers claim, “rape will teach her nothing, leave nothing; rape’s too good for her kind” (178). Rather, it is intimate sexual torture. The sessions take place in Dulcie’s bedroom, which they quietly enter at night. When she hears them, “she arranges herself on her back with her eyes open, her hands folded behind her head” (81), waiting in terror. The narrator writes of men in “black tracksuits” (179), one “waving the electrodes as another took off her nightclothes” (178).

In reading the violence against Dulcie between the lines of David’s story, and recuperating it in her act of writing it back into his text, the narrator addresses the reality which David finds unspeakable, that he later confirms but that he ultimately cannot bear to acknowledge, that which necessitates Dulcie’s erasure from memory, from his story, from history. But the act of recuperation necessarily repeats this violence. The narrator, having claimed responsibility for the imaginative conceptualisation of Dulcie, must do the same for the violation she inscribes. The metanarrative framing of this act does not and cannot mitigate that violation; rather, through it, Wicomb seeks to confront the inevitability of the repeated violation within the restorative endeavour.

At the same time, the narrator evokes in readers a conscious awareness of their part in this repetition. The torturing of Dulcie and the scars on her body are described in great detail, inviting vivid imaginative visualisation. One of the narrative strands of the novel thematises the Western voyeuristic gaze upon the sexualised, oppressed, racial other, through the story of Saartje Baartman – a Griqua woman transported to Europe in 1810, her steatopygous body exposed and exhibited for scientific observation and barely disguised titillation. With questionable consent, the biologist Cuvier published drawings of her genitalia. David, “outrage[d] on Baartman’s behalf”, imagines readers looking at her exposed parts: the

narrator reports “It was the shame in print, in perpetuity, the thought of the reader turning to that page, that refreshed David’s outrage” (33). The act of passive witnessing, or worse – proactive visualisation – is explicitly associated with complicit voyeurism and exploitation.

The reader’s conscious awareness of her conceptual re-enactment in the act of reading is evoked in the ways *you* occurs and operates within a key torture scene (178):

Dulcie believes that there comes a time when physical pain presses the body into another place, where all is not forgotten, but where you imagine it relocated in an unfamiliar landscape of, say, bright green grassland cradled in frilly mountains. In such a storybook place the body performs the expected – quivers, writhes, shudders, flails, squirms, stretches – but you observe it from a distance. It is just a matter of being patient. Of enduring.

In ‘Setting, Intertextuality and the Resurrection of the Postcolonial Author’ (2005), Wicomb discusses the loaded use of first-, second- and third-person pronouns in articulating the self and other. The second-person pronoun in the above extract simultaneously evokes the reader’s conceptual identification with the addressee designated as *you* and also alienation, with the awareness that *you* functions both generally and specifically, and can and does refer to almost infinite others. Use of *you* inherently creates tensions – the reader is at once conceptually pulled into and pushed out of this position.

Such tensions work in tandem here with the explicit positioning of that “you” observing Dulcie’s torture from a safe distance, in “a storybook place”. The position of the “you” here is, however, also occupied by Dulcie herself, as she conceptually projects out of her body, a body which thus becomes disowned and de-gendered, “*the* body” (my emphasis), which then “performs” independent of Dulcie’s sentient agency and feeling. Dulcie, with/as “you”, observes the torture from a distance. Thus, the pronoun positions the reader as both observer of and at one with the tortured Dulcie. Though there is much in the co-textual language to support one or another interpretation of the referential value of the second-person pronoun – in its general sense in some places, as directly implicating the reader in others, and as Dulcie’s

self-address in others (e.g., “the recitation transports you into yet another space. Keeping on the move, like any good guerrilla”) – the reference(s) cannot be conclusively resolved.

The next instance of *you* is a few paragraphs later (179):

She thinks she recognizes some of the voices, but recognition hovers just beyond consciousness. She hallucinates, turns them into friends, family, comrades. [...] Never again does she try to identify them. That is where death lies.

Why don't you take off your balaclavas, show yourselves, she said the first time. Won't that teach me something?

The sentences up until “That is where death lies”, like the instances of FIT described in section 3, lack the conventional backshift in tense, but are in the third person. The explicit thought-reporting clauses here, however, e.g. “She thinks”, seemingly anchor the description primarily in the narrator’s perspective and voice. The torturers are referred to as “them”. The next paragraph, though, involves direct address, using “you”. Without speech marks, the phrase could initially be interpreted as further narration by the pseudo-authorial narrator, and the “you” as direct address to the reader. It is only when the reader reaches the reporting clause “she said”, which reveals the words to be the direct speech of Dulcie addressing her torturers, that the reference can be confidently resolved. For most readers this “you” is not likely to be interpreted as apostrophic (Herman 2002: 341-71), not least as the reference to balaclavas quickly obfuscates this inference. However, the text’s slippage in positioning voice and reference, combined with the dominance, throughout the novel, of the narrator’s metacompositional divulgence to the reader, may encourage the reader to at least consider the apostrophic potential of this reference – that is, to consider how the “you” makes sense as and could be a direct address to the reader.

The Bartmaan narrative helps to create the conditions for this consideration here. A nearby preceding paragraph has described the body “being held under a blindingly bright light, [...] clarity conferred by the gaze of others” (178). The reader is a concealed, gazing other, seeing “from a storybook place”, indeed holding and reading a storybook,

imaginatively visualising and conceptually re-enacting the torture. The reader is positioned as akin to Cuvier's readers who pore over the intimate diagrams of Baartman.

These uses of the second-person pronoun prompt the reader to self-consciously shift between the positions of distant reader-voyeur, to present reader-torturer, to Dulcie herself, at once subject and object. This deictic positioning is “scalar or gradient (*more or less*) rather than binary (*either/or*)” [original emphasis], and unsettled: “the narrative *you* resists being assigned an exact or determinate position on the continuum” (Herman 2002: 350). The linguistic manipulation foregrounds the reader's roles and responsibilities in the subject and object positions in this postcolonial oppression and recuperation. The engagement of the reader, so carefully manipulated by Wicomb, in rendering Dulcie forth, imaginatively speaks to an international form of complicity in oppression by passivity, and an international political and ethical obligation to engage with and take some responsibility for this inhumanity.

4.5. *You At and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*

A further passage involving “you” follows David's failed attempts to write “truth” (136):

Truth, I gather, is a word that cannot be written. He has changed it into the palindrome of Cape Flats speech – TRURT, TRURT, TRURT, TRURT [...] He has [...] tried to decline it.

trurt, oh trurt, of the trurt to the trurt, trurt, by, with, from the trurt
But there is no one to ask. You pass by the austere figures sitting erect in their chairs, but their faces dissolve with the first movement of your lips. You hold up a board on which the question is written, but the disembarking figures that file past the door do not read it; their guarded eyelids drop like shutters. You find the place where the questions are asked, a vast sports hall with no windows, flooded in electric light. Your words break down into letters that bounce about the hall, chasing each other until they fall plop though baskets jutting out from the walls [...]. There are rumours that if you go at midnight, as the clock strikes twelve, you can slip the words into the silent seconds between the strikes of the gong, but you do not believe this; you cannot see how they will not drown in the din.

The site of ‘truth’ evoked here, by the vast, harshly lit halls, the dissolving words, and the secretion of words in silence, is that of the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It is here that “you” are placed. The failure to write ‘truth’ echoes Antjie Krog’s words in *Country of My Skull*, her journalistic novel exploring the commission’s hearings: “The word ‘Truth’ still trips the tongue... Even when I type it, it ends up as either *turth* or *trth*” (1998: 36). The reader is positioned as one giving testimony, seeking truth but also unable to articulate the request for that truth, and overwhelmed by both the silence and the din. “You” are positioned alongside both the victims and the perpetrators of violations under apartheid to which the commission was designed to bear witness. Even within this specific context, however, the deictic potential of *you* gives it the power to reach across national boundaries and inscribe and incorporate all the *yous* of an international readership. The doubly deictic functioning of *you* positions the reader as both a singular addressee and one of a collective – that is, of a readership *being led towards* a collective consciousness of the paradoxical problems and possibilities of giving testimony and bearing witness in narrativising racial and gendered oppression.

Though texts such as *David’s Story* focuses attention on African nations’ internal problems, after and apart from (as far as is possible) the colonial oppressor, the addressee of *David’s Story* is not solely local. The varied intertextual references, not least the many epigraphs, situate the text and its readership within an international literary context, while the South African words and acronyms are explained in a glossary to mitigate the alienation of a non-African reader and guide any *you* into this diasporic postcolonial discourse. The deictic *you* positions the reader inside and outside the text, and inside and outside the nation. The reader shifts on a scale between complicit witness and active agent in the dynamic realisation of the text and of its treatment and voicing of Dulcie. The text’s pronoun use prompts simultaneous readerly identification with and self-conscious othering from its voices. Its

fragmentary incoherence, its layerings of fictionality and its self-reflexivity enable it to resist imposing an ethical stance whilst necessitating an ethical engagement. It is these textual strategies which create, as Driver discusses, “the dynamic relation between writer and reader that Wicomb’s texts are intent on producing” (2010: 538):

Submission to the illusion of reality that political authority produces is a crucial aspect of what is generally considered to be citizenship, but readerly submission to an illusion of reality and to authorial authority over a text is impossible when fictional texts turn reflexively on themselves in a display of their textuality. [...] The I-you relation is crucial in Wicomb’s thinking [...]. Utterance is, in effect, a shared text, created through a process of interlocution rather than being simply the product of speaking. Wicomb’s [...] writing is intent on ‘keeping alive a reader (without whom the notion of a story that is ultimately written cannot be realized) and who therefore exists in a symbiotic, rather than hierarchical relationship with the author’ [Wicomb 2005: 149-50]. If any notion of authority persists in Wicomb’s writing, it resides only provisionally in the act of reading; the writer continually hands authority over to the reader, having educated the reader, as it were, through irony and paradox. Irony and paradox lay bare the ideological entanglement, complicity, the ambiguous claims of reality- and history-effect, and the compromises involved in establishing any meaning at all.

Wicomb’s novel requires the reader to proactively and self-consciously engage with the text in such a way as to resist the authority of both the text and its author, to resist the impulse to impose closure and coherence, and to take collaborative responsibility for the inferences she draws and the interpretations she derives. Wicomb’s metanarrativity and linguistic play, and the paradoxes, ironies and intertextual flux thereby created, impel the reader to intervene in the text and so take part in an ethical engagement – and take up an ethical position – in cultural narratives of representation.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Wicomb’s pronoun use elicits a positioning of the reader which requires a conscious engagement with the ethics of the acts of narrativisation, sense-making, recovery and imaginative actualisation involved in the reading process. Focusing on the act and experience of reading and/as writing *David’s Story*, and the linguistic and ethical

positioning involved in the *Is* and the *yous* of the text, this chapter has addressed the novel's unsettling of authorial and historical socio-political discourses, the (de/re-)situating of the reader, and the implications for a transnational readership within Wicomb's efforts to engender increased political understanding and engagement.

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