Minor Characters and the Short-Story Cycle: The Emergence of Liminal Identities in Zoë Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*

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ABSTRACT

The ten short stories in Zoë Wicomb's ~~volume~~collection *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987) revolve around the development of the educated, middle-class protagonist-narrator Frieda Shenton, a South African coloured girl born when apartheid began. Given the strong continuity provided by this developing figure, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* has often been interpreted as a novel-like fictional account or *Bildungsroman*. My paper, instead, ~~purport~~seeks to discuss the importance of the short--story form in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* as vehicle of ideological resistance. Indeed, the presence of single short narratives allows for the emergence of different protagonists~~,~~ – mostly outcasts and outsiders – who, at times, can counteract the predominance (and authority) of the main, educated narrative voice. My aim, therefore, is to examine how the ~~short story~~ genre of the short-story cycle gives voice to these alternative and liminal protagonists, thereby destabilising the coherence of major narratives~~,~~ and, ultimately, of socio-political structures. In particular, the narrative focus on these figures opens up gaps and fissures in the flow of narration, allowing for the construction of new meanings – in the same way as the different short stories, creating gaps in the macro-structure of the volume, allow for the emergence of ~~alternative protagonists~~liminal identities. ~~In fact, their unconventional otherness leads them to take on the creative role usually reserved to the protagonist-narrator. Thus, the short narrative form in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* brings to the fore the resistance to colonial appropriation and categorisation, a resistance embodied by these liminal, alternative figures.~~

Keywords: ~~[Please add keywords]~~Short-story cycle, Zoë Wicomb, liminality, resistance, South Africa, postcolonial studies

Introduction: ~~Liminal Identities and Liminal Narratives~~The Liminality of the Short-Story Cycle

As Forest L. Ingram points out in his seminal study *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century* (1971), "[e]~~E~~very short-story cycle displays a double tendency of asserting the individuality of its components on the one hand and of highlighting, on the other, the bonds of unity which make the many into a single whole" (~~Ingram~~ 19). In the first work by the South African writer Zoë Wicomb, the collection of short stories *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* published in 1987, the protagonist-narrator Frieda Shenton is the unifying element of the book. Indeed, the ten short stories of the collection portray the artistic and personal development of this middle-class, educated coloured girl during the years of apartheid.[1] Textual evidence of the existence of a central protagonist is already entailed in the title sentence "You can't get lost in Cape Town,"~~,~~ for "to say *you* implies a speaking *I*" (Sichermann, "Literary Afterword" 191). In the ~~volume~~collection, the main "speaking I" is the mature Frieda, who retrospectively gazes at her youth. The presence of a single main protagonist in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* has been acknowledged as the connective factor between the stories, and has led many critics to define the book as a novel, a

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Bildungsroman or, more specifically, a *Künstlerroman* (see Richards 74; Sichermann, "Literary Afterword" 187); André Viola even refers to the volume in Joycean terms, defining it as "a portrait of the artist as a young coloured girl" (231).

Wicomb's first short-story cycle not only portrays the life of Frieda Shenton; it also describes her relatives extensively. Their lighter skin colour, their alleged Scottish origins and their English education define the Shentons as racially and socially superior to the other inhabitants of the rural area of Namaqualand, the region where Frieda grew up. Thus, the distinctive complications in Wicomb's fictional account are "first, that they take place in a country in which the white minority has defined identity in exterior and racial terms; and second, that the central character belongs to a racial category whose ambivalence has often led to denial and self-betrayal" (Sichermann, "Zoë Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*" 124). As a consequence, Frieda's family fully endorses a petite-bourgeois, parochial and patriarchal *Weltanschauung* that deeply obstructs Frieda's formation and growth: according to the Shentons, blacks and Afrikaners occupy a secondary role in society, and they represent an obstacle to one's upward mobility.

Starting from these last considerations, this paper seeks to discuss the importance of the short-story form in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* as a vehicle for ideological resistance, since it allows for the emergence of minor protagonists and alternative, liminal identities. In particular, this paper intends to analyse three short stories whose minor characters discard the Shentons' desire for heteronormativity and defy the unity embodied by Frieda. Indeed, the episodic narratives of "A Clearing in the Bush," "Jan Klinkies" and "A Fair Exchange" do question the interpretation of *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* as a *Bildungsroman*, and foreground the complexity of Wicomb's short-story collection.

> If I *am* grasping around for something fixed and orderly, the gaps *between* the stories at the same time undermine coherence. I think it's important to have chaos on the page, an alternative to the camouflage of coherence that socio-political structures are about. (Hunter, "Interview" 92)

The unifying presence of Frieda well foregrounds the need for order and stability, yet the presence of single short narratives allows for the emergence of different protagonists – mostly outcasts and outsiders. At times, they can counteract the predominance (and authority) of the main, educated narrative voice: "Since stories, as opposed to a single novel, represent a number of different situations . . . the project of fashioning and rehearsing identity is more swiftly achieved through this medium" (Wicomb, "South African Short Fiction and Orality" 164). Indeed, Frieda is at times a secondary character, as proved by the omission of her name in several stories.[4] The heroine, moreover, not only remains an observer as the narrative unfolds (Toerien 326); in some instances, she is actually replaced in her creative *and* narrative role.

In the Interstices of Society: "A Clearing in the Bush"

The fourth story in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, "A Clearing in the Bush," bears witness to this shifting narratorial perspective, reflected in the story's style. For the first time in the book, the episode begins with the voice of a third-person omniscient narrator, who foregrounds the character of Tamieta through the extensive use of free indirect style. Readers, who up to this story have followed Frieda's development, are probably startled by the beginning of this episode, which depicts an unknown character in an unknown setting, the University of the Western Cape, opened in 1960 and reserved to coloured students. Throughout the story, the narrative voice effortlessly alternates between the third

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and first-person narrator (Frieda), but Tamieta's description, which frames the story "A Clearing in the Bush,"~~,~~ quantitatively occupies a prominent part in the episode. The story depicts the University boycott of the memorial service for Hendrik Verwoerd, the "architect" of the apartheid system, who ruled South Africa as Prime Minister from 1958 to 1966, when he was killed. The description of this political event, therefore, appears under the light of two contrasting perspectives, those of Frieda and Tamieta. The two characters share significant features: they are both coloured women coming from the South African countryside – Namaqualand – ~~, Namaqualand,~~ who have moved to the Cape. Nonetheless, their social status differs enormously, as Tamieta points out during the only moment in the ~~narration~~ narrative where she and Frieda actually meet.[5] While Frieda waits for her coffee in the university cafeteria, where Tamieta works, the latter argues with her colleague Charlie, a Muslim boy who makes fun of her because of her country origins; the scene is entirely described from Tamieta's point of view:

> She casts a resentful look at the girl just sitting there, waiting for her coffee with her nose in her blinking book. She too is from the country. Tamieta knows of her father who drives a motor car in the very next village, for who in Little Namaqualand does not know of Shenton? The girl speaks English but that need not prevent her from saying something educated and putting this Charlie in his place. (~~Wicomb, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*~~ 46)

Tamieta is well ~~conscious~~ aware of the economic elements which neatly separate herself from the educated and emancipated girl. The Shentons' economic advantage is symbolised by their motorcar, by their mastery of the English language and by Frieda's superior education. Despite coming from Frieda's same place, Tamieta needs to "work like a slave all Saturday in order to prepare for the day of rest" (44), and she must serve the Shenton girl, as if she were not her equal. Hence her resentment against Frieda, whom she refers to only as "the Shenton girl,"~~,~~ never mentioning her name.

After the first two passages set in the cafeteria, which are meant to introduce Tamieta, in the closing excerpt of the story the woman is seen waiting for Verwoerd's memorial service to begin. Even though she is as coloured as the university students, Frieda included, and in spite of being a victim of the apartheid system devised by Verwoerd as well as the others, she is ~~was~~ excluded from the boycott. This story is illuminating on Wicomb's strategy in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*: the South African writer widens and complicates the apartheid division between white and – in this case – coloured. There are various layers of subjected and discriminated people, so that, depending on the situation, each person can be either victim or dominee, according to the categories of class, religion, gender, origin and, most obviously, skin colour. The addition of an external ~~narrating~~ narrative voice is textual evidence of Wicomb's effort ~~in this direction~~to reproduce the complexity of human experience. Tamieta's point of view shows that the coloured community is not culturally uniform, and that acts of discrimination~~s~~ are perpetuated even from within the discriminated. Her discomfort in realis~~z~~ing that she is the only coloured attending the ceremony is represented in a beautifully written five-page long passage in free indirect speech, which begins with the following lines:

> Tamieta had no idea that the ceremony was for white people only. Oh, what should she do, and the shame of it flames in her chest. Wait until she is told to leave? . . . she has already been seen, and besides how can she trust these legs now that her knees are calcified with shame and fear? (~~Wicomb~~ 57)

This passage contains the word "shame,"~~,~~ which recurs five times in the last pages of "A Clearing in the Bush."~~.~~[6] It is interesting to analyse the shifting significance that this term acquires for the coloured woman in the text. At first, Tamieta feels ashamed of being the only

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non-white person attending the ceremony, and she is convinced of having misunderstood her boss's words regarding the memorial. After seeing some theology students from the seminary, she reali~~z~~ses that coloureds are allowed, and she ~~addresses her~~feels ashamed ~~to~~of the other students instead, who insist on keeping "Coloured time" (58). Thus, she buys into the white and essentialist stereotype ~~of~~ according to which coloureds ~~who always~~ never arrive ~~late~~on time because of their skin colour. She even feels proud to be included in the "Ladies and gentlemen" opening sentence of the rector. At one point, however, Tamieta is struck by the recognition that she should not be at the ceremony, and that no one told her of the boycott. This revelation, almost as sudden as an epiphany in Joycean terms, exposes a "tale of treachery" (59), and the shame she felt at the beginning returns, this time even stronger: "If she could pull out of her plastic bag a starched cap and apron and whip round smilingly after the last amen with a tray of coffee, perhaps then she could sit through the service in comfort. And the hot shame creeps up from her chest to the crown of her head" (59).

Wicomb's description of Tamieta pinpoints her inner life and her thoughts through a brilliant use of free indirect style, so that readers are allowed more than a glimpse into this character's life. Her presence in "A Clearing in the Bush" does not represent a mere counterpoint to Frieda's own development. Her function in this story is actually that of shedding light on the various social classes and divisions running through South Africa. The episode of the boycott appears thus under manifold perspectives: ~~those~~ that of the coloured students, of Frieda, of Charlie and the Muslim community, of the Afrikaners running the university and ultimately of Tamieta. She is the one most affected by the events of the day, as proved by the ~~narrating~~ narrative style which foregrounds her intimate feelings. Hence, readers tend to empathise and identify with her rather than with Frieda – who is here to a degree complicit with ~~of~~ apartheid divisions (Driver, "Zoë Wicomb's Translocal" 20). This, together with the fact that the narration opens and closes with the figure of the elder coloured woman, renders ~~her~~ Tamieta the true protagonist of this short story. This interpretation of "A Clearing in the Bush" is sustained by Wicomb's own choice of a third-person omniscient narrator. There are other instances throughout the book in which the narrative focus is not on Frieda, yet this is the only time in which the author employs a ~~narrating~~ narrative voice other than the protagonist's. The alternation between the two perspectives endows ~~provides~~ Tamieta with the status of an autonomous central character in this short story, and not a mere reflection of Frieda's observations.

The Subversive Potential of Liminality: "Jan Klinkies" and "A Fair Exchange"

The presence of single short stories in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* allows for the emergence of liminal characters – different from Frieda – who are foregrounded either ~~Although Tamieta is the only character whose presence is narrated rendered~~ through an external ~~voice~~narrator, as in "A Clearing in the Bush", or ~~other figures do occupy the centre of some short stories in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, even if rendered~~ through Frieda's own voice. Among the minor characters in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, the eponymous figure of Jan Klinkies, Frieda's distant cousin, deserves to be mentioned – and he is, tellingly enough, the only figure in the book whose name gives the title to a short story. The opening line of "Jan Klinkies,"~~,~~ the second narrative in the collection, begins with a statement regarding Jan Klinkies's "normality" through ~~a~~ litotes: according to Frieda, her relative is "not so strange" (Wicomb 11). The ironic understatement expressed by the rhetorical figure is denied by the subsequent list of Klinkies's everyday activities, which enhance the ironic

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effect: he bunches his trousers with a length of wire, he does not drink coffee or tea and is keen on empty cans. Even if never clearly stated, the allusion in the text (13) to the Group Areas Act may be the explanation to his unusual behaviour. The Act was passed in 1950; it created the legal framework for the South African government to establish particular neighbourhoods as “group areas,”~~,~~ where only individuals of a particular “race” were supposed to live, thus displacing thousands of people and paving the way for racial segregation (Johnson-Castle). In his analysis of *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*, André Viola overlooks the potential resistance offered by the figure of Jan Klinkies, whom he defines as a “half-witted uncle” (232). However, the presence of a whole story dealing with Frieda’s unusual relative cannot be explained, as Viola does (232), only in terms of an anti-climax functional to the economy of the entire short-story cycle. Whilst Viola is still merely concerned with the macro-frame of the *Bildungsroman*, underestimating the creative potential of the single story, a possible interpretation of this text lies precisely in its unconventional central figure.

Under the disguise of irony which permeates the text, Jan Klinkies is vividly represented through the eyes of Frieda. He emerges not only as an outcast, but also as a man who offers a different, liminal and alternative response to the laws of apartheid; he exists within social structure, but in its interstices, continuously transgressing social boundaries (Drewery 3). Instead of following his wife to the Cape Flats after the expropriation of the land, he “developed the irritating habit of saying *no*” (Wicomb 13~~, emphasis in the original~~). His apparently irrational refusal to drink Rooibos tea or Boeretroos coffee, typical South African beverages, is also motivated by his resistance to colonial appropriation. The two drinks are indeed linked to the Afrikaner colonial enterprise, symbolised by the label on Rooibos tea reproducing the Boers’ conquest of the inland, when the rights of the South African populations to claim the land and its products as their own were denied. Frieda’s cousin strips the labels off tin cans, thus “obliterating the set of representations imposed by a white, imperialist, industrialized world” (Driver, “Transformation Through Art” 48).

Jan Klinkies’s significance in this eponymous story, however, is not confined to the resistance he offers to the dominant ideology. In fact, he actively creates new aesthetic forms, using the very same waste produced by colonialism (Whittington 337). This is an interesting interpretation of his otherwise unexplainable habit of collecting cans and wearing a belt made of wire. When Frieda tries to guess her cousin’s thoughts, she imagines an “irrational logic” behind the arrangement of tin cans (Whittington 337):

> But I suspected that careful *aesthetic* considerations had been at play~~.~~ . . . There is the business of balance, for instance; the wrong *shape* could bring the lot toppling down and you’d have to tap sliding cans carefully back into place. And a starting *pattern* could gradually lose its regularity until a completely new one is formed. (Wicomb 16, emphasis added)

After this detailed depiction, Jan Klinkies appears as a “metafictional figure, a conscious architect of marginalia,”~~,~~ as Saikat Majumdar defines him (125), rather than as a mad man. The significance bestowed on Jan Klinkies ~~is~~ emerges also ~~entailed in~~from his name, which relates onomatopoeically to the sound made by tin cans, the objects he uses for his creations (Driver, “Transformation Through Art” 48). The narrator’s own interpretation of her cousin as an artist is never explicitly stated, yet it can be glimpsed in the use of words such as “aesthetic,”~~,~~ “shape,”~~,~~ “pattern” – albeit hidden under a trenchant irony. Jan Klinkies’s engagement with waste has a double direction: on the one hand, it restores dignity to the liminal, the trivial and the banal, an endeavour running throughout Wicomb’s entire work, so that marginalis~~z~~ed details are “epiphanized” into larger significances (Majumdar 125). On the

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other hand, Jan Klinkies thus refuses the culturally charged products of South Africa, and transforms them into an ironic protest against imperialism and apartheid (Whittington 338).

The representation of Jan as an artist and of the tin cans as a form of art reaches its climax at the very end of the short story, when Jan Klinkies's tree, made of cans, is described. Moved by the wind, the cans vibrate and reflect the sunlight, resembling a star: "The tree barely moved, but the branches stooping heavily under the hundreds of cans tied to them with wire rattled and sent off beams of blinding light at angles doubtlessly corresponding to a well-known law" (Wicomb 20). Jan Klinkies thus appears ~~thus~~ as a maker, in the sense that he replaces the false image offered by the imperialist representations on the tin cans' labels with a new form of representation, empty cans emitting rays of light. The narrator, Frieda, states with certainty that the artful tree responds to a "well-known law" (Wicomb 20), meaning that the discarded tin cans must follow some kind of logic, even if opposed to common notions of order and uniformity. This logic, however, is known only to Jan Klinkies; it remains uncharted/unidentified both for Frieda and the reader, and this enhances the complexity of this new image. In fact, Driver ~~Jan Klinkies's tree~~ has ~~in fact been~~ compared ~~by Driver~~ Jan Klinkies's tree to Roland Barthes's description of "a sign system uncoupled from established or discursive truths,"~~,~~ since it is not yet subject to interpretation: the tree does follow a direction, which is however new and unknown, and can therefore produce new meanings ("The Struggle Over the Sign" 529). Wicomb herself spoke of the importance of re-reading an image, and her sentence perfectly suits the apparently absurd image of a tree made of tin cans:

> The represented image then can be altered through language: contradictory relations between image and text demand that the image be re-read, and re-assessment of the visual information involves a change in the underlying presuppositions. The transparency of the image is questioned; the process of re-reading brings home the fact that what we see is ideologically mediated and that alternative intervention in the process of seeing can produce a new meaning.~~-~~. . . (Wicomb, "To Hear the Variety of Discourses" 54)

By interpreting Jan's tree as something other than the irrational product of a mad man, this image acquires a new meaning. Hence, Jan Klinkies appears as an alternative hero, and he does occupy the centre of the narration. The fact that his construction with tin cans can be analysed even through a poststructuralist approach – although the significance of the tree remains open to interpretation – is evidence of the complexity behind this otherwise apparently odd-looking character. Interestingly, some critics have compared Jan Klinkies to the figure of Outa Blinkoog, an old man from Wicomb's novel *Playing in the Light* (2006); he, too, collects flattened tin cans to produce beautiful objects, such as lanterns, and he has therefore been identified with the figure of the artist (see Gurnah 273; Whittington 337).[7] To assume that the tale of Jan Klinkies only serves as an anti-climax to lessen the effect of the several poignant endings in the stories of *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*~~,~~ is to overlook the strength of the centrifugal forces in a short-story cycle in the name of the centripetal ones. Frieda, who constitutes the predominant link between the stories, is here overshadowed by Jan Klinkies, who, through his liminality, paradoxically confines the ~~narrating~~ narrative voice to the position of a mere observer.

There is at least one other instance in which Frieda's presence as main character is narrowed. "A Fair Exchange" is a short story towards the end of the collection, in which the young girl does not appear for more than half of the narration. The first lines may remind readers of the beginning of "A Clearing in the Bush,"~~,~~ with an unknown character described in *medias res* by an external omniscient narrator, with the only difference that "A Fair Exchange" is told in the past tense. The story opens on a family scene, representing a black man, Skitterboud, and his wife, Meid, preparing themselves and their children for the day. The setting is rural, and

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the point of view of these two uneducated characters~~' point of view~~ dominates the beginning of "A Fair Exchange," ~~,~~ with several instances of free indirect style. The story deals with Meid and Skitterboud's separation; the girl has always been less inclined than her husband to follow white rules, and she eventually escapes with another man. Meid's description of their marriage, for example, celebrated by a white magistrate, is telling of her rebellious attitude towards the world of the Afrikaners: "She knew right from the start that the certificate [of marriage] had no power over her; that it was a useless piece of paper" (Wicomb 134). Meid, therefore, becomes an example for the resistance that she offers against her colonial masters. Judith L. Raiskin ~~(227)~~ defines this short story "a dramatic and jarring shift" in the collection, since it is the only story in the book "from the point of view of rural characters who have never left the country nor been encouraged to be anything other than servants and fieldhands for white Afrikaners" (227). Frieda, in fact, appears only at the end of the episode as the audience and actual narrator of Skitterboud's story; consequently, towards the end of "A Fair Exchange," ~~,~~ the rest of Skitterboud's tale is narrated through a dialogue between the two characters in the present tense, foregrounding the "I" of Frieda once again. The black man, however, manages to give predominance to his traditional values and to his *Weltanschauung*, giving Frieda advice such as "you should pay heed, my child, to the elders" (Wicomb 139). Driver compares the figure of Jan Klinkies to that of Skitterboud because both assume a ~~the~~ creative role, limiting Frieda's central position ("Introduction" xxii): even if she assembles Skitterboud's story in a written form, he is the one providing her with the raw material. ~~Also t~~The title is also illuminating: "A Fair Exchange" refers to the two characters' relationship, and it emphasises the importance of the conversation between the educated Shenton girl and the illiterate man from her village. The significance of this story lies precisely in its refusal of a single, dominating perspective:

> If this collection is about the destabilization of white order and what that order entails, the stories do not posit a new monolithic authority in its place. It is not necessarily the authorial narrator who makes meaning, nor is the authorial narrator the site of authority; the use of multiple perspectives, the self-awareness given to many of the characters . . . suggest otherwise. (Driver, "Transformation Through Art" 50)

Conclusion

In the three stories discussed, ~~While the case of "A Clearing in the Bush" stands aside for the presence of an external narrator, "Jan Klinkies" and "A Fair Exchange" focus on figures different from~~ Frieda~~, who~~ is ~~rather~~ present as a "looking glass" on a South African *milieu* distant from her own (Fuchs-Eisner 11). ~~There is, however, a further important distinction to be drawn between Jan Klinkies, Tamieta and Skitterboud. As Majumdar has it, "the contemplative celebration of the quotidian and its banal extremes remains a privilege for the educated, upwardly mobile, creative Frieda. Such contemplation remains noticeably outside the conscious reach of disenfranchised figures such as Tamieta and Skitterboud" (127). As an example of contemplative celebration of marginal details, Majumdar (125) refers to Jan Klinkies's tree, which is described entirely through Frieda's perspective – even if he is the true maker of it. On the contrary, Skitterboud and Tamieta are described by an external narrator, who conveys their inner life through an extensive use of free indirect style.~~[8] ~~Hence, the two characters, being illiterate, they are not able to produce creative new meanings on their own – that is, according to Majumdar, without Frieda's mediation. However, the fact that Tamieta and Skitterboud are given voice and space for self-expression renders them actually more autonomous from Frieda in the text. Furthermore, they embody a set of~~

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of society – ; Tamieta because of their alterity is represented as a her lower social status for Tamieta, and Klinkies as the because of his reputation of "madman" for Klinkies; Skitterboud's liminality, instead, derives from his embodiment of traditional values. Together, they all go against the heteronormativity and conventionality of the educated coloured class, to which Frieda also belongs. The insertion of "Jan Klinkies,", "A Clearing in the Bush" and "A Fair Exchange" in the macro-structure of *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, therefore, serves a twofold aim: not only do the three outcast protagonists refuse colonial appropriation and categorisation; they actually shed light on the complex and multifaceted nature of bias, showing that acts of discriminations can be perpetuated perpetrated even from within by the those discriminated against, in this case, Frieda's family. As we have seen, narrative modalisation is germane to this process, since the narrative focus in these stories swiftly shifts from Frieda to Tamieta, Jan Klinkies and Skitterboud, foregrounding their point of view and limiting Frieda's otherwise predominant perspective.

This interpretation of *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* is even more appropriate if the brilliant, metafictional twist at the end of the last short story, "A Trip to the Gifberge,", is taken into consideration, where Frieda reveals herself not only as a creative writer, but alsoand as the author of the texts in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. Thus, the three instances of character, narrator and author converge in Frieda, allowing for a stark re-assessment of the previous stories. For example, the passages regarding the figure of Tamieta
[illegible]
watermelon": "I would like to bring down my fist on that wholeness and watch the *crack* choose its wayward path across the melon, slowly exposing the icy pink of the slit" (Wicomb 88, emphasis added). Frieda-the-writer, like Wicomb, is interested in the liminal, "the crack falling between pre-existing social norms, classifications, and conventions" (Drewery 3); Tamieta, Jan Klinkies and Skitterboud embody this "crack.". Thus, not only is the predominance of the main protagonist *and* narrator Frieda reduced in "A Clearing in the Bush,", "Jan Klinkies" and "A Fair Exchange."; o On a metafictional level, it is the writer Frieda herself who understands, in her path towards adulthood, the necessity of narrating fragmented, liminal identities, and who chooses the medium of the short story to do so.

Thus, tThe three characters discussed are evidence of Wicomb's attempt at portraying the "variety of discourses" (Wicomb, "To Hear the Variety of Discourses" 47) within the main frame of Frieda as protagonist, narrative voice and (possibly) author. This aspect is already suggested by Wicomb's frequent use of dialogue, multiple perspectives and intertextuality throughout the collection,[9] yet it reaches its heights in the three episodes here considered. The hybrid structure of the short-story cycle complicates the frame of the *Künstlerroman*, and allows for the emergence of other characters in single narratives:

> But characters which in a novel would be "minor" figures are often, in a cycle, the center of interest in some particular story. . . . During those precious moments when the protagonist of a single story occupies the spotlight, he demands our full attention. His story can never be a digression from some kind of "main plot" of the cycle. (Ingram 22)

Tamieta, Jan Klinkies and Skitterboud, therefore, undermine the unity which, through Frieda, characterises *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. In her study on the short story, Valerie Shaw (124) quotes a beautiful metaphor by Chekhov, contained in his *Letters on the Short Story, the Drama, and Other Literary Topics* (1924), in which he compares the main character of a short story to the moon, and the other characters to the stars. The Russian author warns short-story writers against the risk of focusing on the moon only: stars must have their autonomy. Wicomb's characters, – the stars, to use Chekhov's metaphor – represent the centrifugal forces in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape* Town: their function entails the de-construction of a unity principle inside the collection, allowing for the creation of spaces of resistance instead.

Commentato [Npa26]: Could this be clarified / rephrased?

Commentato [Npa27]: Acts of discrimination

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Through their liminality – Tamieta through her lower social status, Jan Klinkies challenging the normative response of coloureds to apartheid, and the illiterate Skitterboud foregrounding the traditional values of his land – they open up gaps and fissures in the flow of narration, destabilising the coherence of major narratives and socio-political structures, and allowing for the construction of new meanings. Ultimately, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* enacts the idea that "liminality is capable of mediating between aesthetic form" – the short-cycle, in this case – "and existential or political content" (Achilles and Bergmann 6).

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Commentato [Npa28]: Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 1983. London: Verso, 2000. Print.
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Commentato [Npa29]: Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 1983. London: Verso, 2000. Print.
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NOTES

[1] By "coloured" it is meant the artificial category of apartheid used to designate people of mixed ethnic origin. This categorisation became law in 1950 with the Population Registration Act, which divided the South African population into Whites, Natives, Indians, and Coloureds.
[2] See Griem (393) for a list of different categories of the genre of the short-story cycle.
[3] See also Griem (392): "It need hardly be mentioned that, in the context of South African literature, acts of generic classification unavoidably call up the apartheid regime's racist taxonomies."
[4] Frieda's name is actually mentioned in three stories only, namely in "When the Train Comes," "Home Sweet Home" and "Ash on My Sleeve."
[5] It is interesting to notice that both Frieda and Tamieta are called "plaasjapie," literally "country bumpkin," by other characters (Wicomb, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* 39, 146). Yet, the same word is used in reference to Frieda as an affectionate nickname, while in Tamieta's case it is pejorative and derisive. This divergence in the use of "plaasjapie" originates from the different social backgrounds of the two coloured women.
[6] For a further explanation of the significance of the word "shame" in building coloured identity, see also Wicomb's essay "Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa" (1998).
[7] Outa Blinkoog is particularly keen on light, which is produced also by Jan Klinkies's tree: "[…] coloured glass helps us remember the miracle of light. You should see my cart, a palace at night, when all these lanterns are alight. People are kind, they collect things; the women save pretty things for me, all the scraps and broken bits that are wasted and thrown away" (Wicomb, *Playing in the Light* 89).
~~[8] Even though readers later discover that it is Frieda who is actually narrating Skitterboud's story, her narrative foregrounds the old man, and Frieda *de facto* momentarily disappears from the written text. In "A Clearing in the Bush," on the contrary, it is never explicitly stated who tells Tamieta's story.~~
[9] See also Sue Marais (33) and Driver ("Transformation Through Art" 49), who speak of a "network" of voices around Frieda.

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