

SOCIAL REALISM IN ALEX LA GUMA'S LONGER FICTION

BY

JABULANI JUSTICE THEMBINKOSI MKHIZE

SUPERVISOR : PROFESSOR DAVID ATTWELL

*Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English,
University of Natal*

January 1998

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated firstly, to my late father, Julius, and my late brother, Senzeni - I know they would have been proud of this achievement. Perhaps most significantly, this work is also dedicated to two important women in my life : mother, Adelaide, and my wife, Siphokazi. Both of them have had to put up with testing situations during the course of this study and thereby bear, in many different ways, the consequences of my almost obsessive preoccupation with this work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A number of people and institutions contributed in the process of bringing this work to fruition. Firstly, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor David Attwell, for his advice and assistance since the inception of this project. His subjection of my work to critical scrutiny has always been accompanied by constructive criticism and encouragement. Secondly, I am indebted to Shoba Sooklall, for her diligence and amazing patience as she typed and re-typed drafts of this document.

I also wish to thank CSD for financial assistance as well as the Programme of African Studies staff at Northwestern University in the US for the fellowship award as well as the conducive atmosphere they created for me to do my work during the six month period I spent in that institution in 1996. The University of Transkei as well as the University of Durban-Westville administrators also deserve credit for granting me six months study leave periods in 1994 and 1996 respectively. The staff of Mayibuye Centre at the University of Western Cape also deserves credit for the warm support they gave me when I visited this institution for research purposes. I also wish to extend a word of gratitude to my colleagues in the English Department not only at Durban-Westville but also at the University of Transkei and University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg for their moral support and encouragement.

The following number of people also deserve praise for their generosity in granting me interviews and for answering a number of other questions in response to my curiosity : Barry Feinberg, Brian Bunting, Phila Ndlovu, Blanche La Guma, Roger Field, James Matthews, Vladimir Shubin, Apollon Davidson, Larisa Saratovskaya and a number of others I have not

mentioned here.

Lastly, I wish to thank my wife, Siphokazi, my mother, Adelaide, my children Linda, Sandile and Mongezi for their support, resilience and their fortitude especially during my absence in 1996. Thanks also to my sisters Thandiwe and Phumla and all my other relatives for their moral support.

DECLARATION

I hereby state that this thesis, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my own original work.

Jabulani Justice Thembinkosi Mkhize



January 1998

Sovietsky narod
Lenin's spirit lives in our distant land -
our names are Dadoo, Fischer, Kotane, Marks.

Sovietsky narod
Gorky's spirit lives in our distant land -
our names are La Guma, Hutchinson, Kgotsitsile, Serote.

Sovietsky Narod
A.N.C. Kumalo

ABSTRACT

This thesis sets out to examine social realism in Alex La Guma's longer fiction by using Georg Lukacs's Marxist theory as a point of departure. Tracing the development in La Guma's novels in terms of a shift from critical realism to gestures towards socialist realism I argue that this shift is informed by Lenin's "spontaneity/consciousness dialectic" in terms of which workers begin by engaging in spontaneous actions before they are ultimately guided by a developed political consciousness. I am quite aware that linking La Guma's work to socialist realism might raise some eyebrows in some circles but I am nonetheless quite emphatic about the fact that socialist realism in La Guma's fiction is not in any way tantamount to the Stalin-Zhdanovite version of what Lukacs calls "illustrative literature". Rejecting Lukacs's conception that socialist realism is a prerogative of writers in the socialist countries, I argue that gestures towards socialist realism made in La Guma's last novels are rooted in South African social reality.

One of the claims being made in this study is that La Guma's novels render visible his attempt to create a South African proletarian literature. For this reason I make a case for Russian precedents of La Guma's writing by attempting to identify some intertextual connection between La Guma's novels and Gorky's work. Where realism is concerned I argue that although La Guma seems to draw extensively on Maxim Gorky in redefining his aesthetics of realism, Lukacs's theory of realism is useful in contextualising his fiction.

The first chapter is largely biographical, examining La Guma's father's influence in shaping his political ideology and his literary tastes. Chapter two focuses on La Guma's aesthetics of realism. In chapter three I examine La Guma's journalism as having provided him with the subjects of his

fiction and argue that there is a carry-over in terms of La Guma's style from journalism to fiction. Accordingly, I provide evidence of this carry-over in the next chapter on *A Walk in the Night* in which I argue that while La Guma's style is naturalist the novel is critical realist in perspective. Chapter five contextualizes the shift from *And A Threefold Cord*, to *The Stone Country* as providing evidence of La Guma's use of "the spontaneity/consciousness dialectic". In chapter six I read *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* in relation to Gorky's *Mother* as its intertext in terms of its gestures towards socialist realism as seen for example in its "positive heroes", Beukes and Tekwane. There are further elements of socialist realism in *Time of the Butcherbird* which are nevertheless brought into question by some ideological contradictions within the text - this is the central thrust of my argument in chapter seven. I conclude this study with a brief discussion of La Guma's craftsmanship.

CONTENTS

PREFACE		i
CHAPTER ONE	: Alex La Guma: Cultural and Political Development	1
CHAPTER TWO	: Realism in Alex la Guma's Aesthetics	31
CHAPTER THREE	: Journalism: the Roots of Alex la Guma's Counter-discourse	67
CHAPTER FOUR	: From Fact to Fiction: <i>A Walk in the Night</i>	93
CHAPTER FIVE	: "Road to Consciousness" : <i>And a Threefold Cord</i> and <i>The Stone Country</i>	109
CHAPTER SIX	: A Narrative of Resistance: Gestures Towards Socialist Realism in <i>In the Fog of the Season's End</i>	133
CHAPTER SEVEN	: Reading the Ideological Contradictions in <i>Time of the Butcherbird</i>	150
CHAPTER EIGHT	: Conclusion	166
WORKS CITED		171

PREFACE

Alex La Guma was probably the most prolific black South African writer in his lifetime - having written fourteen short stories, five novels and one play. Yet as a result of his banning and that of his writings in the country of his birth a whole generation was deprived of access to his work. The result has been that, at least until 1992 only one full length study of La Guma's novels had been produced within this country's borders; other studies of La Guma's work have been done either by foreign scholars abroad or, ironically, by other South African scholars who had to go abroad to write their theses on this author's work.

The political changes in the country since February 1990 have helped make La Guma's work more accessible to literary scholars within the country's borders. The result is that there has been an upsurge of interest in La Guma's works which have since been reinstated into the South African literary canon. Accordingly, this has created a need for more research on La Guma's writings, which will help draw students' attention to his contribution to the South African literary legacy and, hopefully, generate some critical debate on his work. This project is, therefore, a minor contribution to this debate which will, hopefully, be taken up by other scholars.

In some circles it would, perhaps, be regarded as an anachronism that at a time when theories of modernism and postmodernism, amongst others, have been used as paradigms to analyse, challenge, relativise and interrogate the concept of realism in literature, one would set out to examine the nature of realism in a particular author's works. Nonetheless, this should not come as a surprise especially when one attempts to examine the writings of a self-confessed realist such as La Guma, who, as this study will show, was obviously conscious of the literary

tradition within which his works were produced. I therefore do not read La Guma's novels against the grain; instead, I am interested in the ideological underpinnings of his social realism. My interest in this regard lies in the fact that although critics have generally been in agreement on La Guma's fiction as being informed by social realism, an exhaustive study of this aspect of La Guma's fiction has not yet been done. This study does not in any way make a claim to being exhaustive but is merely an attempt to re-evaluate La Guma's social realism in the novels within the context of his aesthetic, ideological, and cultural background.

CHAPTER ONE

ALEX LA GUMA : CULTURAL AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

In a paper read at the First Pan-Cultural Festival in 1973, Alex La Guma emphasised the need for cultural workers to reclaim the African cultural heritage and urged the liberated African countries to ensure that everyone had access to education because, in his words, "Knowledge is the weapon in the struggle for final emancipation" ("African Culture and National Liberation" 99). He then made the following statement with regard to the democratisation of culture:

The main distinguishing feature of a true democratic cultural revolution is its mass, nation-wide character. The strength and vitality of the revolution is derived from the awakened creative energy of the masses and their aspirations for new life, enlightenment and culture. Real progress cannot be decreed from above; living creative progress is the product of the masses themselves. We must raise the lowest sections of the population to the state of making history.

In these words, La Guma not only made clear his belief in the pivotal role of culture in the struggle for liberation, but also summed up what may be regarded as the guiding principle of his revolutionary philosophy throughout his life. For not only did La Guma, as a cultural worker, attempt to ensure that "the lowest sections of the population [are] raise[d] to the state of making history" by way of his writings, but, in his role as a political activist, he also identified with the interests of (and fought on behalf of) this constituency in his unwavering dedication to the liberation struggle in South Africa. For La Guma "the lowest section of the population" is undoubtedly the (black) working class, a fact which not only becomes obvious in the working class bias of most of his novels but also has a great deal to do with his upbringing.

Alex La Guma was born in District Six in Cape Town on 20 February 1925. While his mother was working in a cigarette factory in Cape Town, his father, James or "Jimmy" La Guma, was working as a trade unionist for the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU), the first mass-based black trade union in this country under the leadership of Clements Kadalie. Although La Guma informs us that his parents were both "politically conscious people", it was largely his father's political activities which had a considerable influence on his social and political outlook. Against the background, then, one cannot look at Alex La Guma's cultural and political development without examining his father's role in the South African liberation struggle.

James La Guma was born of French and Malagasy parents in Bloemfontein in 1894. He started working at the age of eight in Parow in Cape Town in the bakery of a coloured businessman. When his parents moved to the city, La Guma started going to school but because of poverty he had to drop out while doing standard two and work for a Cape Town firm. La Guma's interest in education did not dwindle, however, but as Alex La Guma tells us, he "became an avid reader of anything he could lay hand on". James La Guma's reading tastes had a lot to do with his political development. Alex La Guma puts it succinctly:

James La Guma's association with the working class movement started during his boyhood. Among the books which had impressed him was Tressel's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. This account of the life and struggles of workers fascinated him, and Tressel's tuberculosis stricken hero was also Jimmy's. He saw in the book the struggles of all working people ("Jimmy La Guma : A biography" 2).

Jimmy La Guma's literary taste was to have a similar impact on his son, as will be shown later. His early interest in working class issues was demonstrated by his involvement in a demonstration of the unemployed in 1906 in protest against unemployment which was rife in Cape Town during

this period. Describing the impact of this demonstration on his father, Alex La Guma tells us: "For him it was a mixture of fun, adventure and participation in the class struggle" (3).

It was, however, Jimmy La Guma's involvement in the strike action of the workers against inhumane conditions in the German controlled diamond fields in Ponomo in South West Africa in 1918 which was a turning point in his interest in the working class struggles. For this industrial action La Guma - who was accused of being a "troublemaker" because of the pivotal role he played - and his fellow workers were sent to Luderitz. Alex La Guma describes what happened on their departure to Luderitz:

(Jimmy) La Guma remembered from his past reading that workers usually marched under the red flag. From a fellow worker, he borrowed a neckerchief, a faded cloth decorated with white polka dots. This was tied to the end of a stick and raised. With the neckerchief fluttering bravely in the hot Namaqualand sun, held aloft by some unknown standard-bearer of the class-struggle, the trainloads of workers pulled out of the diamond fields. (6-7)

It was this early interest in working class politics that, inevitably, led him to become a member of the ICU and help establish its branch in South West Africa (now called Namibia) in 1919. In 1921 La Guma was requested by Kadalie, the chairman of the ICU, to assist in the administration of the union in Cape Town and by 1926 he was one of the prominent members of the union in his capacity as the general secretary.

In addition to his prominent role in the ICU, La Guma was also a member of the African National Congress(ANC). It remains unclear, however, when exactly Jimmy La Guma joined the ANC, but it appears that the white miners' strike of 1922 with its major demand for the maintenance of

the colour bar in the mine industry may have served as an impetus for his joining of the ANC.¹ Alex La Guma tells how the racial overtones of this strike prompted his father to realise the vital role of a nationalist liberation movement in the struggle against capitalist exploitation (13). By 1928 La Guma was already secretary of the ANC branch in Cape Town.

Nevertheless, it was primarily to working class interests that Jimmy La Guma was to devote much of his attention during the early period of his political career. La Guma's commitment to working class interests was, however, not confined to his involvement in the activities of the ICU. For this prominent political figure, who is described by Jack and Ray Simons as "one of the first coloured radicals to abandon the concepts of liberalism for Marxist theory and class struggle" ((267), working class interests went beyond trade union activities. It is therefore no coincidence that La Guma was to find a political home in the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), a party which was formed in 1921 and was to serve as an embodiment of working class interests. Not only was La Guma a member of the party, which he joined in 1925, but he was also in the executive of the party by 1926 as well as the secretary of the Non-European federation of Trade Unions in 1928, in addition to his position as secretary of the ANC branch in Cape Town.

It was, nonetheless, in the Communist Party that La Guma was to play a pivotal role in his contribution to the liberation struggle. Nothing provides evidence of La Guma's dedication to the Party so clearly as his refusal to resign from the Party when Clements Kadalie tried to compel members of the party to relinquish their positions either in the trade union or in the party. This dual membership of the ICU and the Communist Party (CP) was discussed at a meeting of the ICU held in Port Elizabeth on 19 December 1926. Kadalie tried to discredit the Party by suggesting that it was "a white man's party, and the non-white members were puppets of the

whites" ("A Biography" 18). Despite Kadalie's recourse to nationalist or racial sentiments, party members such as La Guma, Thomas Mbeki and A.J. Khaile, amongst others, refused to resign. Ultimately, Kadalie carried out a resolution to bar the members of the Party from holding office in the ICU.

As if in response to his expulsion from the ICU, La Guma's contribution to the Party was to have significant historical consequences. La Guma's election to attend the International Congress of the League Against Imperialism and for National Independence as a representative of the Party in Brussels, Belgium, in 1927 (together with Josiah Gumede of the ANC and D Colraine, a representative of the South African Trade Union Congress) is significant in this regard. For it was at this congress that the South African delegation drafted a resolution which demanded "the right for self-determination through the complete overthrow of the capitalistic and imperialist domination" in South Africa (22) - a resolution which the Brussels Congress adopted. The resolution may have served as an impetus for La Guma's subsequent attention to the national question in South Africa. After addressing meetings in Germany following the conference, La Guma and Gumede left for Moscow, where La Guma discussed the South African National question with members of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), especially with Nikolai Bukharin, then a prominent party member.

La Guma's first visit to Moscow after the Brussels conference is of particular significance both in terms of his contribution to the South African liberation struggle as well as the impact it might have had on his son's political and literary development later in his career. La Guma's encounter with Bukharin is significant in this regard. For Bukharin was not only an important party thinker according full support to Stalin's New Economic Policy of the time but, as editor of an official

Party newspaper, *Pravda*, he also played a significant role in promoting proletarian literature through his support of the Proletkult. This brief encounter with Bukharin must have had an impact on La Guma, who is described by his son as having been an avid reader of working class literature - and later on his son's reading tastes as well.

Of particular significance with regard to this visit to Moscow, however, was La Guma's submission of a statement on the South African situation to the Communist International (Comintern), in which he argued for the establishment of a "native republic" as a precondition for the realization of socialism. Jack and Ray Simons sum up La Guma's argument in the following words:

First establish majority rule, he argued, and unity, leading to socialism, would follow. The party should therefore concentrate on strengthening the movement for national liberation, and at the same time retain its separate identity and role as a socialist party. Communists should "build up a mass party based upon the non-European masses", unite landless whites and natives behind an energetic agrarian policy, give expression to the demands of African workers and dispel their illusions that the British acted as intermediaries between them and their Afrikaner oppressors. The "native republic" slogan would act as a political catalyst, dissolving traditional subservience to whites among Africans and racial arrogance towards Africans among whites.² (398 - 399)

La Guma's argument on the South African situation received the blessing of the executive of the Comintern, which then submitted the adoption of the slogan, "An independent native republic as a stage towards a workers' and peasants' government with full guarantees of the rights of minorities" for discussion by the CPSA ("A biography" 48). This proposal was, however, vehemently rejected and criticised by some members of the Party, with S.P. Bunting being its most vociferous critic. Bunting was of the view that the "native republic" slogan would alienate "all

whites including the workers, and could lead only to a racial war which would indefinitely postpone the socialist revolution" (Bunting, *Moses Kotane* 37). For Bunting, it was "through the class struggle and the achievement of socialism" under the banner of the Party that national liberation was to be achieved (35). After a lengthy debate amongst members of the party in Cape Town, the "Black Republic" thesis, as it was later called, was endorsed by the CPSA in 1929. Commenting on La Guma's pivotal role in the formulation and subsequent adoption of the Black Republic policy the Simonses argue:

Only a person who combined a firm adherence to Marxist theory with a passionate belief in national liberation could conceive the prospect of African rule as a necessary first stage to the achievement of a classless society. Such a person was James La Guma....(398)

The Black Republic thesis, which was based on Lenin's 1920 thesis on the national and colonial question, in terms of which the national liberation struggle against imperialism is seen as the first stage towards socialism, was to have a profound impact on the relationship between the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party (as the CPSA was later known) at a later stage in the history of the struggle. For in the words of Francis Meli, it underlined the crucial "relationship between African nationalism and socialism, by stating that the concept of class struggle must of necessity incorporate the principle of national self-determination for Africans and other nationally oppressed blacks" (79). Most significantly, the "Black Republic" thesis, which underscored the collaboration between British imperialism and "the white bourgeoisie of South Africa" (Bunting, *South African Communists Speak* 91), was a precursor to the "colonialism of a special type" (CST) theory, which formed the central thrust of "The Road to South African Freedom", the programme of the South African Communist Party (SACP) adopted in South

Africa in 1962. In terms of the CST theory, "the oppressing white nation [occupies] the same territory as the oppressed people themselves and [lives] side by side with them" (*South African Communists Speak* 299).

In the words that clearly signal the official justification of the alliance between the SACP and the ANC, the programme also states that the South African Communist Party set out as "its immediate and foremost task the attempt to work for a united front of national liberation" and "to strive to unite all sections and classes of oppressed and democratic people for a national democratic revolution to destroy white domination" (*South African Communists Speak* 286). James La Guma's position is clearly indicated in the following words which conclude the introduction of the programme:

The destruction of colonialism and the winning of national freedom is the essential condition and the key for future advance to the supreme aim of the Communist Party: the establishment of a socialist South Africa, laying the foundation of a classless, communist society. (286)

Although the fully worked out ideological orientation of the 1962 programme owes a great deal to other Party theorists such as Moses Kotane, secretary general of the Party since 1939 and ANC leader since the 1940's, and Dr Yusuf Dadoo, once chairman of the Party and a prominent Indian leader in the 1940's, it is clear that it is La Guma's contribution to the Black Republic thesis which informs the development of the CST theory. It is therefore no coincidence that the Simonses refer to La Guma as "the chief architect of the black republic policy" (450) : this intellectual role was bound to have a significant influence on Alex La Guma, especially with regard to his perspective on national liberation and class struggle in South Africa.

Apart from his prominent role in the Communist Party, Jimmy La Guma was also a founder member of the National Liberation League when it was formed in 1935. Though this was a Cape Town based organisation, it went some way towards strengthening solidarity amongst Africans, Coloureds and Indians when it convened a conference held in Cape Town in 1938. The result of this conference was the formation of a Non-European United Front whose members, according to the Simonses, expressed "faith in the principle of working class solidarity and ... hope that white labour would support their efforts to secure equality in political, social and economical life" (501). James La Guma also played a prominent role in the South African Coloured People's Organisation (SACPO), an organisation that was formed in 1952 and was to make a vital contribution to the Congress tradition of politics as the South African Coloured People's Congress in the 1950's. He was in fact the President of this organisation when he died in 1961.

It is clear, then, that Alex La Guma was born in a home where working class politics and the national liberation struggle were a major preoccupation, and was encouraged from the beginning to think in class terms and to see the situation of Coloured people in the national context. At one level, it was the existence of "an atmosphere of working class activity and ideas at home (La Guma, "The Real Picture" 16) which aroused La Guma's curiosity as a child and helped develop his political consciousness. Writing under the pseudonym, Gala, La Guma describes this experience tersely:³

I do not remember my parents ever sermonising me as [a] child, but one was always being advised to devote oneself to "something useful", or "to lead a useful life". A picture of Lenin hung in our living room. Very often people came to visit and I would hover on the outskirts of the conversations, listening to chats about politics, trade-union work, or the "Party". (Gala, "Doing Something Useful" 50)

La Guma recalls enquiring from his mother about the picture of Lenin on their living room wall and being informed that his father was "a follower of Lenin" and that "Lenin had been the leader of the great change in Russia which had done away with poverty so that people no longer need to be poor". When he probed further, La Guma goes on to tell us, his mother told him that "[his] father and others like him used the teachings of Lenin to show workers in the country that they could achieve happiness for themselves and their children" ("The Picture in the Parlour" 168). If one considers that La Guma's father had as early as 1928 organised a "Labour College" where African workers were given lectures in working-class politics and theory ("A biography" 41), it becomes more probable that La Guma was inevitably going to be exposed to the teachings of Marxist-Leninism from an early age. As La Guma himself puts it: "...all the time, one heard discussions of the teachings of Lenin. It was strange and exciting that the ideas of the man on the parlour wall could cause such a debate in our country so far away from his" ("The Picture in the Parlour" 168).

Although La Guma argues that his parents did not politically indoctrinate him, he, nevertheless, concedes that his father had a great deal to do with "moulding" his "philosophical and political outlook and guiding [him] towards serious works, both political and cultural" ("The Real Picture" 18). Inevitably, it was to his father that the young La Guma was to look up in order to find out how one could "lead a useful life". La Guma recalls how as a young "schoolboy artist, [he] was asked to help paint posters, decorate the banners or illustrate the leaflets which his father's work demanded" ("Doing Something Useful" 50). He was already part of the marches and demonstrations even before he entered high school in 1938. As a high school student at Trafalgar in Cape Town, La Guma relates with obvious cynicism how he discovered that they were taught by "politically conscious" teachers. La Guma informs us:

After classes we were invited to attend lectures of a "political nature". There I heard long and dull discourses about the "permanent revolution" as well as dire criticisms of and outright attacks on the Soviet Union. This was offensive to me, for in our family we had always been taught to cherish and admire the Socialist Sixth of the World. I soon gave up attendance of these "activities" which also went under the guise of "cultural programmes". (51)

The position being rejected here was the Trotskyian version of the "permanent revolution" as espoused in South Africa in the 1940's by the leaders of such organisations as the All-Africa Convention (AAC), the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) and, significantly, the Cape African Teachers' Association. This version of the theory of the "permanent revolution" rejects the national democratic phase of the revolution and espouses, instead, the idea that the revolution has to be "socialist in character" and immediately establish a dictatorship of the proletariat. Dialego succinctly identifies the characteristics of this vision from a perspective La Guma would have shared:

Trotskyism in South Africa (as elsewhere) has the following characteristics: It opposes the democratic revolution as a distinct phase in the struggle for socialism; it is unable to get to grips with the national question; its theoretical dogmatism prevents it from coherently distinguishing between the "form" and "content" of class struggle, and its abstract view of politics encourages élitist and anarchist styles of organisation. ("What is Trotskyism?" 69)

La Guma's rejection of this position is understandable. Firstly, La Guma's father who, at the invitation of VOKS, the Society for Cultural Relations in the USSR, visited Moscow for the second time in October 1927 in order to attend the tenth anniversary celebrations of the October Revolution, and was impressed by this first socialist state, had been part of a group (of people) who watched Trotsky and his colleagues being sent to exile for their anti-Soviet activities ("A biography" 36). It could therefore be hardly expected that La Guma who had "always been taught

to cherish and admire the Socialist Sixth of the World" could follow the Trotskyite direction. Furthermore, the Trotskyist version of the theory of "the permanent revolution" seeks to subvert the "Black Republic" thesis, which, as has been shown, underscored the significance of the national liberation as a phase towards socialism, and, by implication, the Marxist-Leninist theory of the revolution on which this thesis extensively draws. By rejecting this position, which, in its interpretation of the struggle, sought to undermine his father's intellectual contribution to the South African struggle, La Guma was therefore being true to family tradition.

Where La Guma's cultural development is concerned, nothing serves as a better example of his father's influence on him than his literary taste as a high school student. Like his father, La Guma became an avid reader from an early age. Writing under a different pseudonym, Arnold Adams, La Guma outlines some of the sources of his cultural and political development:

I read *The Iron Heel* and saw in Jack London's "people of the abyss" my own community ground down under the weight of poverty, oppression, ignorance. Could it be that the oppressed people all over were the same? In *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* I saw our own working men. These books moved me more than the set books we were given to read (at) school. I wasn't interested in *The Adventures of Maurice Buckler* or *Mica Clarke*. ("Why I Joined the Communist Party" 59)

As can be expected, Alex La Guma read very widely during the course of his development. Amongst others he also read the classical Russian writings of Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Gorky, Sholokov and American writers such as Farrel and Steinbeck.⁴ As James Matthews, his fellow writer who worked closely with La Guma in Cape Town before the latter fled the country, told me in an interview: "Alex was influenced by every writer who had a profound feeling of the social deprivation of others."⁵ However, it suffices for the moment to underline James La Guma's role

in nurturing his son's literary taste, especially in working class literature. This can clearly be inferred from the description of the profound impression that Tressell's masterpiece, in particular, with its extensive focus on the social deprivation of the working class and its vision of a just society in future, had on both of them. The working class bias of most of Alex La Guma's novels later in his literary career can, therefore, be attributed partly to his early exposure to this literary tradition - his father's guidance of him towards these works is significant in this regard.

Like his father, who became a member of the South African army in the Second World War, the fifteen year old La Guma tried to volunteer to serve in the army as a way of making his contribution to the struggle against fascism, but this offer was turned down because of his small physique and his age. In retrospect, La Guma sums up the impetus behind his offer:

Nazism was overrunning Europe. I knew about the stupid system that turned my own people into strangers in their country. We were continually reminded that we were "Non-Europeans Only"; in Europe they were butchering Jews and gypsies, and Hitler called us "subhumans". We were all one, because we were all being persecuted, and they were fighting in Europe. I wanted to fight the Nazis, but when I left home to join the armed forces the recruiting officer found me underweight and too skinny. ("Why I Joined" 59)

This demonstrates not only La Guma's consciousness of world history and its political dynamics but also his stand against racism in its international dimension from an early age. La Guma was at that stage a fifteen year old matric student but, as he tells us, he was more interested "in seeing the defeat of Nazism than [he] was in his examinations" ("The Real Picture" 17). The result was that La Guma dropped out of school (in order to join the army) before he could complete his matriculation and, having enrolled at the Cape Technical College, he passed matric in 1945 when he had already started working.

Obtaining a matriculation certificate did not, however, make La Guma think about the prospects of furthering his studies, because for him there was more to life than formal education could offer.

As he puts it:

You wanted to get through school in order to enter a more dynamic world. After high school I turned away from further education because it appeared that life held more serious things than more certificates based on knowledge that had little to do with reality. ("Why I Joined" 59)

La Guma's opportunity to enter "a more dynamic world" came when he was employed as a factory worker by the Metal Box Company in Cape Town. Although La Guma was initially romantic about the prospects, it was while he was working for this company that he learnt about the hardships of being a worker - an experience that facilitated the emergence of his interest in working class issues. Once again, La Guma's political background, underpinned by Marxist-Leninist teachings and working class politics generally, is manifest, as the following account of his spontaneous relationship with fellow workers demonstrates:

At lunch time I found myself talking to the workers. I seemed to have become a great talker. I talked about lots of things, I remember. International news, South African politics, the colour-bar. Some of the workers viewed me with curiosity. They asked me whether I was a communist. Certainly I was a member of the trade union. Was I a communist? I must have been telling them things, explaining situations, in the manner of a communist. (60)

As a member of the trade union committee at the Metal Box Company, La Guma was in the forefront in the organisation of a strike for better wages and better working conditions. He recalls "a somewhat juvenile talk [he] gave on the meaning of class struggle" during the course of the strike ("Doing Something Useful" 51). As a result of his involvement in this strike action, La

Guma lost his job. Although La Guma later "realised" that the situation was "much more complicated" than he saw it ("My books have gone back home" 71), this experience was, nonetheless, significant in his development.

After his dismissal from the Metal Box Company, La Guma found work in the art department of Caltex Oil Company in Cape Town. Blanche La Guma, his wife, tells us that it was while La Guma was working for Caltex that "he took a correspondence course in journalism which was to serve him well in the future" ("Alex La Guma : A Wife's Memory" 7). It was also while he was working at Caltex that La Guma started recruiting members for the Communist Party and, interestingly, this (apparently spontaneous) recruitment drive preceded La Guma's official membership of the party. La Guma recalls how he used to encourage fellow workers at Caltex to attend meetings on the Grand Parade in Cape Town where the Communist Party held "lunchtime talks" ("Why I Joined" 60). Introspection prompted La Guma to take a decisive step in his political commitment: "One day I realised that while I had been encouraging my mates to take more interest in those things which were keeping them in that position of indignity as second class people in their own Motherland, I could do more myself" (61). The young La Guma finally joined the Young Communist League in 1947 and became a member of District 20 of the Communist Party by 1948.

One may, of course, argue that, given his home background and, more specifically, the influence of his father who somewhat played the role of his political mentor, it was inevitable that La Guma should join the Communist Party. La Guma himself indicates that his family background had a great deal to do with this move: "perhaps I was influenced within the circle of our family - certainly that had something to do with it" (51). "On the other hand", La Guma continues to

point out, "there were [other] independent experiences which made me as an individual more and more aware of the necessity to change the face of our country" (57). Some of the motivations for joining the Communist Party which La Guma cites include the appalling conditions of life under which the predominantly working class community of District Six lived; his own reading of working class literature which sensitized him to the plight of the workers in other parts of the world as well as the potential revolutionary role that could result in workers changing their situation; his experiences as a worker which provided him with a first hand practical encounter with the conditions of the working class in his own country; lastly, the working class internationalism demonstrated by the Party during the war when it interpreted fascism as a threat to the working class all over the world and gave its full backing to the Soviet Union.⁶ It was thus logical that La Guma, who even at this early stage was determined to "raise the lowest sections of the population to the state of making history", should find a political home in the Communist Party. Having joined the Young Communist League, La Guma began getting some lectures from his father "on the honour and importance of being known as a Communist", La Guma tells us ("The Picture in the Parlour" 168). Joining the Young Communist League (YCL) also provided La Guma with the opportunity to delve deep into the theories of Marxist-Leninism. La Guma tells how as members of the YCL they "read Lenin's works and debated youthfully and fervently". Two years after La Guma had joined the CPSA, however, the organisation had to disband, preempting the banning of the Party by the government. The Nationalist government, nonetheless, declared it an illegal organisation in 1950 and La Guma was "listed under the Suppression of Communism Act as a known communist" (Abrahams, *Alex La Guma* 7).

La Guma continued being involved in politics, however, even after the banning of the Party, participating more in local and nationalist campaigns rather than working class activities. When

a Coloured People's Convention was called in 1953 and the South African Coloured People's Organisation was formed, La Guma was one of the founder members. The South African Coloured People's Organisation (SACPO), a national coloured organisation, was formed to mobilise and unite all Coloureds to resist the Separate Representation of Voters Bill of 1951, which was aimed at removing the Coloureds from the common voters roll, and to align itself with the ANC's campaign against apartheid and for equal rights for all South Africans (Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall* 269). La Guma became a member of the executive of SACPO in 1954 while he was still working at Caltex, but, after some time, he resigned from this company to become a full-time organiser for SACPO. In November the same year, La Guma married Blanche Herman, who was to give him support in his political and cultural activities and, above all, endure all the suffering that accompanied being a member of the La Guma family. In 1955 La Guma became chairman of SACPO and was instrumental in organising SACPO for the historical Congress of the People held in Kliptown in June 1955. While La Guma and several other SACPO delegates were on their way to Kliptown, they were arrested in Beaufort West and released without being charged only after the conference had ended. SACPO members, nevertheless, vowed to carry the Freedom Charter to every corner of the land in their capacity as members of the Congress Alliance, which adopted the Charter in 1955. After its 1959 December conference the South African Coloured People's Organisation changed its name to the South African Coloured People's Congress (or CPC) to fall in line with the Congress Movement under the auspices of the African National Congress.

The period from 1955 to 1962 was a significant phase in both La Guma's political career and his writing career. Firstly, in 1955 La Guma was asked to join the staff of *New Age*, a newspaper that served as the mouthpiece for the ANC and the SACP, at its headquarters in Cape Town.⁷ It was

after joining the staff of this progressive newspaper that La Guma "really started to write seriously" ("The Real Picture" 19). Secondly, as chairman of the South African Coloured People's Organisation, La Guma played a leading role in challenging the government's 1955 Race Classification Bill and the South African Act Amendment Bill which effectively removed Coloureds from the common voters roll. He was also in the forefront in the struggle against the decision of the Cape Town City Council in April and May 1956 when the municipality decided to segregate buses (Abrahams, *Alex La Guma* 8). In December 1956 La Guma and other leaders countrywide were arrested and charged with treason. Since the history of the 1956 Treason Trial is well documented, it suffices to point out here that the central argument of the State against the accused revolved around suspicions of the existence of a conspiracy to overthrow the existing government by force as well as the allegation that the Freedom Charter was a communist inspired document, and that the trial dragged on until 1961 when, as a result of insufficient evidence, the accused were acquitted.

As one of the accused in the Treason Trial, La Guma wrote extensive reports on the trial for *New Age*. On May 2, 1957 La Guma was assigned a regular column entitled "Up my Alley" by *New Age*. As Cecil Abrahams inform us: "It was through this humorous and at times bitingly satirical column of 'Up My Alley' that La Guma became well known in Cape Town" (*Alex La Guma* 12). Significantly, it was La Guma's work with *New Age*, specifically his new column, through which he established himself as a chronicler of liberation, that paved the way for his literary career - as this thesis will show in Chapter Three. As Andre Odendaal and Roger Field indicate in a recently published collection of La Guma's articles and reports, "many of the themes in his short stories and novels are first encountered and developed in the early newspaper articles" (*Liberation Chabalala XVIII*). It was largely as a result of his political work and perhaps partly because of

his biting journalism that people who called themselves "the Patriots" made an attempt on his life on May 15, 1958. According to Blanche La Guma's account of the incident:

When the matter was reported, the police showed no interest. Only when he received an unsigned note reading "Sorry we missed you, will call again - 'The Patriots'" did they come to the house to inspect the hole made by the bullet into the wall. That was two days after the event. ("A Wife's Memory" 10)

Immediately after the Sharpeville incident of March 1960, in which people burned their passes outside a police station as part of their anti-pass campaign and sixty-nine people were shot by the police, the South African government declared a State of Emergency and arrested many political activists all over the country. La Guma was one of those detained and he spent five months firstly in Roeland Street prison and then at a special prison in Worcester in the Cape before he was released. Despite all odds, La Guma's commitment to the struggle did not waver. "In the multi-racial, multi-national community of political detainees lay the guarantee of a future, free South Africa...we have come out of the jails stronger, more determined than before" wrote La Guma in a report for *New Age* ("State of Emergency" 147-148).

In 1961 when Nelson Mandela, the then leader of the African National Congress, called a national general strike in protest against South Africa becoming a white republic, La Guma went underground and helped organise the Coloured people in Cape Town to rally around Mandela's call. He was detained for ten days for his involvement in the campaign. Following his release in June 1961, in August the government imposed a five year banning order on La Guma under the Suppression of Communism Act. In 1962 La Guma was, according to his wife, 'the first person to be placed under twenty-four hour house arrest' ("A Wife's Memory" 13). This restriction order prohibited him from attending public gatherings and effectively forced him to resign from

New Age. In October 1963 both La Guma and his wife were detained under the "Ninety-day solitary confinement clause". After Blanche's release from jail, she was also served with a banning order. Her husband continued to be under house arrest after his release. Blanche La Guma tells us that since banned people could not associate with one another, she had to ask for permission to live with her husband which was granted to her (13). La Guma was again arrested under the "180 days solitary confinement clause" in 1966 and upon his release he was instructed by the African National Congress to leave South Africa with his family and settle in exile in London. La Guma told Cecil Abrahams: "It was felt that after having spent four years under house arrest and going for the fifth year with the prospect of another five years...one could be more constructive outside. So we came to Europe to carry on what we were doing on another front" ("The Real Picture" 25).

The period from 1962 to 1965 was significant with regard to La Guma's writing. La Guma used the restriction orders to get down to the business of writing fiction. According to Abrahams, La Guma wrote a number of short stories such as "At the Portagee's", "Blankets", "Coffee for the Road"; "Tattoo Marks and Nails"; "The Gladiators", "A Matter of Honour", and "The Lemon Orchard" during this period. In 1962 La Guma's novella, *A Walk in the Night*, which had originally been sent to Nigeria for publication in 1960 but was deliberately delayed in the post office after La Guma's arrest, was published by Mbari in Ibadan. According to Cecil Abrahams, Blanche La Guma handed the manuscript of this novella to Ulli Beier when the latter made a personal visit to South Africa in 1961 ("Alex La Guma" 217). La Guma had earlier published some of his short stories in *Black Orpheus*, a Nigerian based journal published by Mbari under the editorship of Beier, Mphahlele and others. Later, La Guma himself became a member of the editorial committee of *Black Orpheus*. It was therefore through his links with Beier that *A Walk*

in the Night was published by Mbari. The novella focuses on the harsh conditions of life in District Six, a working class community characterised by abject poverty, violence and police repression. It is this novella which established La Guma as a writer of international repute. Between 1962 and 1963 La Guma wrote *And a Threefold Cord*, a novel whose plot revolves around the lives of the members of the Pauls family, who despite their poverty in the slum area of the Cape Flats are determined to survive. Cecil Abrahams quotes La Guma as having said that he was approached by Seven Seas to provide them with "something" at a time when "he had no outlet for his creative work" and, "in response to their request", he "offered them *And a Threefold Cord*" (Alex La Guma 69). It would therefore seem that it was the impact of La Guma's novella *A Walk in the Night* that prompted Seven Seas Publishers to make this move. According to La Guma this novel was written while he was in prison in Roeland Street, so his attorney brought him the contract for his signature. The novel was subsequently published by Seven Seas Publishers in East Berlin in 1964. On his release from prison, La Guma wrote *The Stone Country*, a novel which is based on the prison experiences of ordinary prisoners in a South African jail. It was, nevertheless, not until 1967, when La Guma was already in exile, that this novel was published by Seven Seas in Berlin.⁸ From this account, then, it is clear that the period from 1960 to 1965, the larger part of which La Guma spent under twenty-four hour house arrest, was indeed a period during which La Guma "did most of his writing" ("A Wife's Memory" 12).

During the period of exile in London, La Guma continued with his political work - addressing anti-apartheid gatherings as a representative of the ANC in the United Kingdom in 1966 and 1967. He also retained his membership of and worked for the SACP (which had been established as an underground movement in South Africa in 1953). Because of the secrecy that Party members maintained during the period of repression this has not been recorded in earlier

biographical accounts.⁹ For the purpose of survival, Blanche La Guma worked at London hospitals, while La Guma worked for a private radio agency owned by Dennis Duerden. While working for Duerden, La Guma wrote a number of detective stories "based on a fictitious African detective named Captain Zondie" (Abrahams, *Alex La Guma* 17). When the private radio agency closed down La Guma found work as an insurance clerk at Abbey Insurance Company in London, a firm for which he worked from 1968 to 1970.

La Guma's period in exile was also marked by a number of important developments with regard to his cultural productivity. As early as 1969 - three years after his arrival in London - La Guma was awarded the first Lotus Prize for literature by the Afro-Asian Writers Association, a prestigious award which he accepted from Prime Minister Indira Gandhi at New Delhi in India in 1970. This award must have served as an impetus for La Guma's production of his next work, *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, a novel on the underground activities of ordinary people who have decided to wage an armed struggle against racial capitalism.

This novel was, according to La Guma, conceived and drafted in South Africa although it was fully written in London. As Abrahams tells us: "After a short holiday in India with his wife, La Guma returned to London and worked furiously on his fourth book, *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*" (18). This novel was eventually published by Heinemann in 1972. Furthermore, and perhaps more significantly, La Guma's period of exile afforded him an opportunity to attend and address numerous conferences in different parts of the world, and, thereby, share ideas with other literary figures the world over. For La Guma, on the one hand, this exposure did not only broaden his cultural horizon but also provided him international recognition as an author of undoubted repute. For readers and researchers interested in La Guma's work, on the other hand,

La Guma's conference papers and essays published in exile are most valuable since they provide useful information on La Guma's conception of the function of literature as well as his argument on the relationship between culture and politics.

At another level, however, it has been argued that the exposure La Guma received during this period, which inevitably drew his attention to the need to address an international audience as well, may have inadvertently led to apparent contradictions between his politics and the aesthetic construction of his work, as exemplified in his last published novel, *Time of the Butcherbird*.¹⁰ According to this view, this contradiction may be attributed not only to La Guma's condition of enforced exile, "which deprived him of the benefit of writing on an "intimately known community", but also to his changing "aesthetic ideology" (Maughan-Brown 33).¹¹ Drawing on the statement made by La Guma in an interview with Robert Serumaga in 1966, in which La Guma indicates his attempt to achieve a "universality of opinion" by moving beyond a set of apartheid-created "compartments", Maughan -Brown detects in La Guma "an element of aesthetic backtracking" (35), the evidence of which is provided, inter alia, by what he perceives as La Guma's residual belief in the "universals of traditionalist criticism" (34).

One cannot dispute the existence of a contradiction between the ideology of the text and authorial (as distinct from aesthetic) ideology in the example provided nor can one dismiss the possible traces of a liberal humanist aesthetic in some of La Guma's extra-fictional statements. However, La Guma's use of "universality" in this context seems to have a lot to do with the writer's will to transcend the barriers of race in his writing - hence La Guma's reference to the failure of writers to "project (themselves) across the colour line" earlier in that interview - and as such it may be seen as La Guma's reflection on the charterist position (or the pluralism of the ANC as some

people have called it). It could also be argued that La Guma conflates universality with revolutionary internationalism as can be inferred from his assertion that the writer "tries to spread out, extend his views, extend his opinions and get opinions from other sources so that he doesn't become confined to his ivory tower"; or the argument that "universal ideas could still be expressed" even if one is writing "within a particular environment".¹² Viewed in this perspective, then, Maughan-Brown's assertion that once "the concept of universals is accepted, the whole question of the legitimacy of literature's serving historically specific political ends is thrown back into the melting pot" is somewhat problematic. Moreover, to make reference to "La Guma's assertions about the relationship between culture and politics after his exile" (34) or "aesthetic back-tracking on the part of La Guma once he was established in exile" seems to imply that La Guma may have made assertions on this relationship before his exile. Evidence suggests that it was not until La Guma was in exile that he started throwing some light on his aesthetics - a factor that seems to have been overlooked in Maughan-Brown's provocative albeit incisive essay. Against this background, then, I would argue that if there are any traces of some tenets of liberal humanist aesthetics in some of La Guma's statements, these are overshadowed by La Guma's consistent and heavy reliance on Marxist aesthetics of realism, which is informed by what Lukacs himself (adding weight *from within* the Marxist tradition) calls "proletarian humanism", in a reference to Maxim Gorky's writings. What is debatable, however, is whether La Guma's theory itself is compatible with his practice throughout his writing career. I shall return to this debate in more detail in Chapter Seven (since, while interesting, it is slightly digressive here).

Turning back to La Guma's activities in exile, La Guma's arrival in London was followed by a number of invitations from various cultural formations. For example, soon after his arrival in London, La Guma was invited to participate in the Scandinavian-African writers conference in

Stockholm in 1967. In this conference La Guma shared ideas with other African writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Wole Soyinka, both of whom were generous in their accolades for his literary talent. It was at this conference that La Guma for the first time made statements on his ideas on literature and commitment in an open debate. In the same year, and immediately after the conference in Stockholm, La Guma was invited as a guest at the Fourth Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in Moscow. As Abrahams points out: "This visit to the Soviet Union was the first of many to come" (*Alex La Guma* 17). These regular visits to the Soviet Union afforded La Guma an opportunity to have constant contact with the Soviet Writers Union and must have had an impact on his aesthetic commitment to socialist realism (at least in theory). In 1975, after a six-week tour of the Soviet Union at the invitation of the Writers Union, La Guma wrote a book entitled *A Soviet Journey*, a travelogue in which he records his impressions of the Soviet Union, which was published by Progress Publishers in Moscow in 1978. Although La Guma had regular contacts with the Soviet Writers Union, he seems to have spent a great deal of his time on his cultural activities with the Afro-Asian Writers Association. La Guma's links with this association began during the first year of his arrival in London when he was invited as a guest speaker at the Third Congress of the association in Beirut. Perhaps in recognition of his talent as a cultural worker, the members of the Afro-Asian Writers Association elected La Guma as deputy secretary-general at its Fifth Congress at Tashkent in the Soviet Union in 1975. He was initially appointed acting secretary-general in 1977 (when the Egyptian secretary-general of the association died in Cyprus) and was eventually appointed secretary-general of the same association in 1979 (Abrahams 19). In the same year, La Guma, who had been instructed by the ANC to represent its interests in the Caribbean, Central and Latin America in 1978 and was operating from Cuba, produced his last published novel, *Time of the Butcherbird*. This novel deals with forced removals and resistance to them as well as the vindictiveness of Shilling Murile in the murder of

his brother, and has been seen as the least successful of La Guma's works in terms of literary merit.

Regrettably, Alex La Guma was not able to come back to South Africa and be a witness to the realisation of his dream for a non-racial and democratic South Africa, as envisaged in the Freedom Charter to which he subscribed. La Guma died of a heart attack in Havana, Cuba, in 1985 at the age of 60. According to Blanche La Guma, before his death, La Guma was busy working on a novel to be called *The Crowns of Battle or Zone of Fire*.¹³ He was also contemplating writing an autobiography and a travelogue on Cuba, where he had been a representative of the ANC since 1978 (Chandramohan 194).

Nothing provides more evidence of La Guma's enormous contribution to South African culture and politics than as the honours La Guma received from a number of countries before his death.

Abrahams sums up La Guma's achievements in the following words:

The Soviet Presidium awarded La Guma the Order of Friendship; the Republic of Congo gave him the President Nguesso Literary Prize; the French Ministry of Culture awarded him the much coveted title of Chevalier des Arts et Lettres; and the Soviet Writers Union set a special evening to pay tribute to him and to celebrate the publication of a half a million copies of his selected works. (Abrahams, *Memories of Home* vi)

This catalogue of achievements clearly epitomises the climax of La Guma's political and cultural development and underlines the need for an in depth study of his legacy.

NOTES

1. None of the sources available on James La Guma's biographical details provides the exact date on which he joined the ANC - even Alex La Guma's biography of his father glosses over this issue. ("Jimmy La Guma : A Biography", an unpublished manuscript is by courtesy of the James La Guma Memorial Committee through Mayibuye Centre at the University of Western Cape).
2. The phrase "dissolving traditional subservience to whites among Africans and racial arrogance towards Africans among whites" immediately calls to mind Steve Biko's assertions in *I Write What I Like*. It is perhaps such statements in James La Guma's argument that prompted Joe Slovo's conclusion that the Black Republic thesis foreshadows Black Consciousness in South Africa (*Amakomanisi : The South African Communist Party 1921 - 1986* (video cassette). The ideological thrust of the "Black Republic" thesis is, however, different from the terms of Black Consciousness.
3. I am indebted to Brian Bunting, a renowned Party historian, thinker and literary critic, who informed me about La Guma's pseudonym, "Gala", which, he explained, was derived from the author's name and surname. Using this information, I was able to deduce La Guma's other pseudonym "Arnold Adams".
4. See for example "The Real Picture" (18). La Guma's wide reading habits were also confirmed by his wife, Blanche, in an interview with Chandramohan (199) as well as in a letter to the author dated 10th March 1994. In her words : "Alex was an avid reader,

amongst authors whose works he read was Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Gorky and others too numerous to mention".

5. It was James Matthews who first drew my attention to the importance of Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*.
6. It is perhaps important to note that even before the Soviet Union became involved in the war, at a time when the CPSA still held the belief that the war was only the concern of the imperialists, Jimmy La Guma, his father, did not endorse this initial party position. According to Alex La Guma, his father maintained that the Second World War was an anti-fascist war being waged against Hitler and Mussolini who were not only "implementing imperialist ambitions, but were also attacking the working class of Europe and its vanguard". "Internationalism demanded that the workers of Europe be defended" concluded James La Guma ("A biography" 67). This interpretation of events by his father would have had a bearing on La Guma's interest in joining the army as well as on his consciousness about the need for international solidarity with the working class.
7. In joining this progressive newspaper as a reporter, La Guma was once again following the path of his father who, in the 1930's, was an editor of *Liberator*, a monthly journal of the National Liberation League in which Alex La Guma himself assisted as a juvenile artist.
8. As a listed person La Guma's writings could not be published in South Africa.

9. I am indebted to Barry Feinberg, La Guma's comrade in an SACP unit in exile, who brought this to my attention in a conversation I had with him at Mayibuye Centre on 24 March 1994.
10. Although Feinberg stated that La Guma's later novels were aimed at eliciting international solidarity because it was felt that an international awareness campaign would bring more supporters to the cause, La Guma indicated in a letter to Jane Grant that his target had not really been an international audience. "I never actually have a foreign readership in mind, but wrote, and continue to write, the way I believe the story or novel should be written according to the gospel of Alex La Guma", Grant quotes him as having stated in the letter (Grant 49).
11. Some "anomalies" that Maughan-Brown notes in his critical essay on *Time of the Butcherbird* were identified by Mbulelo Mzamane earlier (see "Sharpeville and its Aftermath" 39, 40). I shall deal with this novel in depth in chapter seven.
12. In a letter to Grant this is implicit in the assertion "the revolution is international, and if my characters act out their parts on the South African stage, I hope they are also saying something to non-South Africans" (Grant 50).
13. There are conflicting accounts on this unpublished novel. According to Blanche La Guma, La Guma indicated to her shortly before his death that he had "all his ideas" on "Crowns of Battle" or "Zone of Fire" "in his head". "He died before he started [writing] the book", Mrs La Guma wrote in a letter to the author. On the other hand, Cecil

Abrahams states in a letter to the author (dated 6 June 1994) that, in the end, La Guma abandoned the idea of "Zone of Fire". According to Abrahams, in this novel La Guma would have "continued to look at the liberation struggle as suggested by Peter, Paul and Michael at the end of *In the Fog of the Season's End*" ("Alex La Guma" 8). By implication, the central thrust of this novel would have been the actual waging of the struggle since the latter novel ends when the three characters leave the country for military training. Instead, La Guma became interested in the Rorke's Drift battle and began writing a novel called "Crown of Battle". Kenneth Parker corroborates Abrahams's argument that at the time of his death La Guma was working on "Crowns of Battle" and even goes further to indicate that the title comes from the lines: "Let the heroes display proudly their crowns of battle" from the Zulu epic *Emperor Shaka the Great* by Mazisi Kunene ("Alex's Walk to Freedom" 9). Abrahams explains elsewhere that this novel had been "planned extensively and two rough chapters had been written" ("Alex La Guma" 225). At the time of writing Abrahams indicated to me that he was working on the unfinished manuscript of this work with the aim of bringing it out for publication (letter to the author). Mrs La Guma does not, however, appear to be aware of the manuscript.

CHAPTER TWO

REALISM IN ALEX LA GUMA'S AESTHETICS

Alex La Guma has provided a number of reasons to explain what prompted him to write fiction. One of the reasons he provides is that he had a feeling that not enough had been said on "the character, condition and mood of South African people". Although he acknowledged that South Africa had produced "a wealth of literature", he argued that each writer, "believing that others have failed" would like to make his contribution even for the purposes of correcting what one "feels certain others might have misrepresented" ("To Literary Gazette" 37). In this sense, then, La Guma wanted to provide a more truthful representation of social reality in South African fiction than had been done thus far.

Foremost amongst members of the South African community who, La Guma felt, had been misrepresented were the working classes and the poor. Here is La Guma on this point:

Having read South African literature, I discovered that nothing satisfactory or worthwhile from my point of view had been written about the area from which I sprang. So I think there was a conscious effort on my part to place on record the life in the poor areas, working class areas, and perhaps for that reason most of my work is centred around that community and life ("The Real Picture" 9).

La Guma here clearly identifies himself with, and regards his point of view as consistent with, that of the working class: in a word, his ambition was to create a South African working class literature. It is thus no surprise that in line with his attempt to "put on record" the lives of the

poor working classes, La Guma perceives his role as a writer and his "function as that of an historian of the people" (21). For this reason, I have found George Lukacs useful in contextualizing La Guma's thinking and his works.

LUKACS'S AESTHETICS AND LA GUMA'S WORK

Lukacs argues that realism embodies an objective approach to the social world and that realist fiction provides a convincing picture of historical and social change. It was perhaps with this view in mind that La Guma turned to realism in his self-assigned role as "an historian of the people". In the words of Lukacs, the basic premise of the realist school is the recognition that "Man is *zoon politikon*, a social animal". According to this view, derived from both Aristotle and Marx,

the individual existence [of characters]...their "ontological being"...cannot be distinguished from their social and historical environment. Their human significance, their specific individuality cannot be separated from the context in which they were created. (*The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 19)

In Lukacs's terms then, the cornerstone of realism is the acknowledgement of the individual's fate as being inextricably bound to his/her social and historical environment. It is this recognition of the merging of the private and public domains, the individual and the historical, that constitutes the notion of "typicality", a crucial concept in Lukacs's aesthetics of realism, in terms of which individuals are seen as "social units" who are actively involved in the socio-historical forces that shape their future. In short, a socio-historical perspective is a necessary condition for the realisation of realism.

There is no doubt that a socio-historical perspective plays a vital role in La Guma's fiction. One

pointer to this trend can perhaps be seen in the development from one novel to another that marks La Guma's craftsmanship and establishes his authority as a social realist. This progressive development provides a fictionalised analysis of the historical development of the political struggle in South Africa in terms of the gradual development of political consciousness in La Guma's characters. As La Guma himself points out, in these novels he "hoped" to portray "truthfully" what went on in the lives of the poor and the working class and "at the same time to indicate the developing sense of revolt which was fermenting all the time within the communities" ("To *Literary Gazette*" 38). La Guma's broader project then, the one that can perhaps be identified as a crucial feature of his social realism, was to present the working class as both "objects and subjects of history" (Lunn 79). Related to the trend of development in La Guma's novels is the sense in which central protagonists in each novel can be described as "typical", not as "abstract personifications of historical trends" nor as "symbolised abstract functions of class struggle" as in naturalism, but in the Lukascian sense in which characters become an embodiment of the general social conditions and yet individuals in their own right. The point in question, argues Lukacs, is the organic, indissoluble connection between a person as an individual and as a social being, as a member of a community (*Studies in Realism* 8)*

The crucial question, however, is this: where does La Guma's social realism fit in to the terms of Lukacs' paradigms of different categories of realism? Is La Guma's social realism closely identifiable with the classic realism of Balzac and Tolstoy to whom Lukacs bestows praise for having portrayed society as a progressive force, in spite of their ideological outlook? Can La Guma's work be seen as belonging to the naturalist tradition within realism, which is characterised by a chronicle of facts, as exemplified in Zola, Flaubert and American naturalists? Is La Guma a critical realist in the manner of Thomas Mann, who is described by Lukacs as having used an

"indirect method" to portray "historical change and development" (*The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 107) albeit from a bourgeois point of view? Finally, can La Guma be classified as a socialist realist who is influenced by the Soviet aesthetic of heroic figures who serve as leaders of the revolution?

Any attempt to confine La Guma's fiction to a single category of realism would fail to do justice to his oeuvre, not only because it would inevitably ignore a multiplicity of influences that inform his writing, but because it would blur the distinctions - both ideological and structural - which exist in some of La Guma's novels. For this reason the claim that La Guma is "the main representative of South African naturalism" needs more elucidation than Vladimir Klima provides (*Black Africa: Literature and Language* 257). It is certainly accurate to argue that La Guma's narrative style is naturalistic in so far as it reveals his often cited pre-occupation with the documentation of minute details. This pre-occupation cannot only be explained in terms of La Guma's stint in journalism but may, to a certain extent, be attributed to his access to the writings of American naturalists such as James Farrel, John Steinbeck and Ernest Hemingway, as well as to the likelihood of his reading of Zola's writings.¹ However, not all of La Guma's fiction shows this feature, although it is, nonetheless, an important character of his early writings such as *A Walk in the Night*, *And A Threefold Cord* and *The Stone Country*.² For this reason, then, it may be a legitimate claim to argue that this narrative style is more symptomatic of La Guma's carry-over from journalism to fiction than it is of his access to the writings of American naturalists.

In a further attempt to put La Guma in the fold of naturalism some critics have identified environmental determinism as a remarkable facet of his fiction³. To provide a rationale for this claim these critics argue that the fate of La Guma's characters is dictated by the environment over

which his characters have no control, thereby associating his fiction with pessimism - an attribute which would seem to be in stark contrast to the optimism of La Guma, the political activist, as articulated in his extra-literary writings.⁴ The indissoluble link between naturalism and pessimism has been challenged by some critics who argue that naturalism is not inconsistent with the optimism of the future, nor is it strictly bound to deterministic ideas about the causes and goals of life.⁵ However, turning back to La Guma, I would argue that if determinism is indeed a notable characteristic of some of La Guma's writings it would seem to have more to do with materialistic determinism of Marxist theory (to which La Guma subscribes) than it has to do with naturalism as identified by some critics in La Guma's writings.⁶ The persistently articulated belief that a communal programme of political action would result in socio-economic change is but one indication that La Guma's fiction rejects the environmental determinism usually associated with naturalism. Moreover, La Guma's realism seems to defy the "static and sensational perspective" (Johnson 29) which Lukacs links with such writers as Zola and, through the Lukacsian conception of "typicality", desists from portraying individuals who appear as "embodiments of abstract general laws" (27). My argument, then, is that the naturalist-realist tradition in La Guma's fiction is, in most cases, only a matter of descriptive style rather than anything else.

Where the question of La Guma's association with critical realism is concerned, I would argue that some of the salient points raised in Coetzee's "Man's Fate in Alex La Guma's Novels", an essay about which its author has expressed some reservations, should not be dismissed out of hand. These include, amongst others, the fact that La Guma's novels "become progressively more political" (345) and that political understanding is embodied in the consciousness of the protagonists (358). I also share his idea that La Guma is a critical realist. However, I take the view that the association of La Guma's work with a predominantly critical realist tradition can

largely retain its validity only with regard to *A Walk in the Night* rather than the other novels. Where this novella is concerned, La Guma does not only go some way towards meeting the demand of "the sincerity of the writer", Lukacs's criterion for critical realism, which Coetzee describes as "naive" (*Doubling the Point* 338), but also provides, in terms of the novella's fictional world, the historical insight into the present and hints, however in a subtle way, into the possibilities of a heroic future through the symbolism of the "dawn" of a new situation (*A Walk* 96). In Lukacs's terms *A Walk in the Night* has to be seen as working within the confines of a critical realist perspective in so far as it "emphasizes contradictions" within the racial-capitalist world of the Cape by "indirectly revealing [its] psychological and moral consequences" on the lives of the largely proletarian community of District Six. We are made to see a character such as Michael Adonis as a product of this racial-capitalist world which destroys his humanity. In this sense, then, I share with Coetzee the view that *A Walk in the Night* is naturalist in style but critical realist in perspective.

After *A Walk in the Night* La Guma, however, attempts to move beyond the confines of critical realism and leans towards socialist realism. Although he expresses his support for the Zhdanovite version of socialist realism in theory - for example in a critique of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's fiction and Nobel Lecture (dealt with later in this chapter) - there is no evidence to suggest that this version, which Nkosi refers to as "the dreary uninspired socialist realism of the ungifted but doctrinaire writer" ("*Alex La Guma : The Man and his Works*" 107); is put into practice in his fiction. Instead, the shift from an essentially critical realist tradition in *A Walk in the Night* towards socialist realism in the next novels becomes a gradual process. This cannot only be explained solely in terms of La Guma's craftsmanship but is also attributable to his attempt to adapt the socialist realist tradition to the realities of the South African situation.

In the next two novels, *And a Threefold Cord* and *The Stone Country*, La Guma, I would argue, begins in earnest his project of forging a South African working class (proletarian) literature. For in both these novels he not only "emphasises the contradiction of racial capitalism" (in the critical realist fashion) but, through his portrayal of the central characters, Charlie Pauls and George Adams respectively, he attempts to depict, in the words of Lukacs, "human beings whose energies are devoted to the building of a different future" (*The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 96). It is no coincidence that both Charlie Pauls in *And a Threefold Cord* and George Adams in *The Stone Country* express the need for a communal sense of solidarity amongst the poor and the oppressed as a way of dealing with the insecurities of racial capitalism. My argument, then, is that in these two novels La Guma combines a critical realist perspective with a socialist realist perspective embodied in both the characterisation of the central protagonists and the symbolism that points towards the prospects of a better future.

In La Guma's next novel, *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, the author's attempt to use a socialist realist perspective becomes more pronounced. In this novel, more than in any of La Guma's earlier novels, there is less focus on an analysis of the contradictions of racial capitalism but far more emphasis on the activities of a revolutionary working class as a force working towards the future. The collective heroism of the working class involved in an underground struggle against the South African government in this novel may in fact be seen as indicative of Maxim Gorky's influence on La Guma, especially through his novel, *Mother*, which established Gorky as the father of socialist realism. Following Lukacs, therefore, I would argue that *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* is a socialist realist novel which portrays "individuals working for [a better] future from the inside" (95). La Guma still attempts to adopt a socialist realist perspective in his last published novel, *Time of the Butcherbird*, but this time his attempt is marred by ideological

contradictions within the text itself. The genuine attempt to use the "spontaneity/consciousness dialectic" by way of exploring the interaction between Shilling Murile and Mma Tau in the context of the possibility of a forced removal from their area is also undermined by an analysis that underscores social contradictions in terms of cultural nationalism. The result is that the socialist realism of the last novel is not as successful as that of *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*.

In conclusion, then, I would argue that, while critics have emphasized the progressive development in La Guma's novels in terms of a gradual development of political consciousness in his central characters, they have overlooked the shift from critical realism to socialist realism, which is part of this progressive development in terms of the social realism that characterises his fiction.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN REALIST DEBATE

La Guma's work has always been at the centre of the realist debate in South Africa - a clear indication that he is known as one of the writers in South Africa who is seen as consciously working within a particular realist tradition. This debate was initiated by Lewis Nkosi who argued, in his 1967 essay, that there was a lack of tradition - "indigenous" or "alien" - in South African literature written by Blacks ("Fiction by Black South Africans" 221). Instead what one gets from black South African writing, Nkosi went on to argue, is "the journalistic fact parading outrageously as imaginative literature" without any effort being made to "transmute these given social facts into artistically persuasive works of fiction" (222). Nkosi does provide an indication of a tradition he would prefer South African writers to follow and that is the experimental line of modernism which, he feels, would rescue black fiction from the "straightforward" documentary

realist narrative. Amongst those artists who, according to Nkosi, have failed to "transmute given social facts into artistically persuasive works of fiction", is Richard Rive in whose novel, *Emergency*, Nkosi finds a failure "in characterisation and imaginative power to do justice to the desperate human situation with which he is dealing" (222). On the contrary, Nkosi is generous in his accolades for Alex La Guma who, despite the fact that he "tills the same apartheid plot which other writers have so exhaustively worked up" distinguishes himself "as a true novelist" by his optimism ("his enthusiasm for life as it is lived") (226). Nkosi finds in La Guma's work, *A Walk in the Night*, "distinct Dostoevskian undertones" (227). In short, unlike Rive's failure "in characterisation and imaginative power to do justice to the desperate human situation" in *Emergency*, Nkosi admires La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* despite its employment of a realist narrative which the central thrust of Nkosi's essay seems to be aimed at undercutting.

In his intervention in this realist debate, J.M. Coetzee picks up this point more cogently. Coetzee argues in his 1971 essay, "Alex La Guma and the Responsibilities of the South African Writer" that "the Western line of experimentation" (which Nkosi clearly favours) would seem to "perpetuate a rift between the writer and society at large" (6). The writer, Coetzee correctly suggests, "should not choose his tradition at random, but rather choose it with some sense of social implications for his choice" (6). This is precisely what La Guma is doing, Coetzee points out in his brief but illuminating examination of *A Walk in the Night* in which he convincingly shows that this novel "exemplifies a conception of literature radically different from Nkosi's" (7). According to Coetzee, La Guma's novel is informed by a critical realist tradition which is exemplified in La Guma's truthful depiction of the Coloured situation and the gesture towards "potentialities for heroic action" (11) as captured in the symbolism of the "dawn" of a new situation (10). Coetzee continues this line of argument in another essay, "Man's Fate in the

Novels of Alex La Guma". David Attwell captures Coetzee's argument in this essay cogently:

In "Man's Fate in the Novels of Alex La Guma" Coetzee goes on to argue, via George Lukacs's studies of realism, that La Guma is a critical realist who politicizes his art by gesturing toward a revolutionary transformation of history encoded in characterization and symbolism: thus, La Guma arrives at narrative solutions that have an implicitly progressive social hermeneutic. (*JM Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing* 12)

In a word, then, La Guma is a social realist who is conscious of the ideological implications of working within this tradition.

Seventeen years after the publication of Nkosi's essay, this debate was taken up by Njabulo Ndebele. Following Nkosi, Ndebele argued in "Turkish Tales and Some Thoughts on South African Fiction", an essay that has since become seminal in South African critical debates, that "what we have (in South African black fiction) is creative writing's almost obsessive emulation of journalism" (45). This apparently heavy reliance on an obsessive documentation of oppression has, according to Ndebele, inevitably led to the production of an aesthetic of "anticipated surfaces rather than one of processes", an art which lacks the potential for a transformative impact on the reader's consciousness because it is grounded on political exposition. Such kind of fiction thrives on an aesthetic effect based on "identification" and "recognition" (45), Ndebele argues. Ndebele takes the debate much further in his later essay, "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary", suggesting that writers should "rediscover the ordinary" by exploring a wide range of human experience, thereby avoiding "the representation of the spectacle" (37) as embodied in narratives which are preoccupied with a documentation of oppression. Rediscovering the ordinary, it turns out, also includes an effective use of subtlety so that the reader's imaginative faculty is challenged and, in

this way, the transformation of his/her consciousness is assured.

Curiously, Ndebele provides La Guma's story "Coffee for the Road" as an example of the "spectacular" and cites amongst other things, "the complete exteriority of everything", "the dramatic contrasts all over the story" and the "intensifying device of hyphenated adjectives" as pointers to the "spectacle" in this story (43). There are no grounds to doubt the persuasiveness of Ndebele's argument in this regard; however, one may argue that Ndebele's argument seems to have overlooked the fact that La Guma's documentation of minute details in this and other stories is indicative of his indebtedness to a naturalist tradition within realism. Moreover, one wonders at the randomness of Ndebele's choice of this particular story by La Guma! The same technique (the documentation of minute details) is used much more effectively in *A Walk in the Night*, which Ndebele does not make reference to because, one suspects, it would put into question the validity of his argument with regard to La Guma. Gordimer's comment that La Guma's protagonists in this novel "do not talk about inequality" (29) "but bear its weals" is illuminating in this regard - in a word, La Guma avoids the "spectacular" without dispensing with the documentary technique.

This debate invokes the 1930s debates between Lukacs and Brecht amongst others which were triggered off by Lukacs's attack on Bloch's expressionism. In the local version of the debate it would seem that Nkosi subscribes to Brecht's argument in terms of which the use of the experimental line of modernism is seen as compatible with the realistic aesthetic. For example, Nkosi has a lot of praise for Bloke Modisane's *Blame Me On History* because it "shows a dedication to a superior form of realism which succeeds partly because the author is alive to the fact that reality itself is elusive to the process of Time as an orderly sequence of events" ("Fiction

by Black South Africans" 223). Coetzee, it has been shown, employs Lukacs in his defence of La Guma's oeuvre. Unlike Nkosi, who displays some bias towards modernism, Ndebele does not seem to be suggesting that the writers should dispense with the realist tradition per se; instead, he postulates a return to a realist aesthetic in terms of which individual characters in a text grapple with the problem of "internal" contradictions of their identity. Michael Vaughan, for example, has shown how Ndebele's own fictional work, *Fools and other stories*, is not only written in the realist tradition but is also targeted at the development of an "intellectual leadership" ("Storytelling and Politics in Fiction" 194). It should be clear, then, that the ideological function which La Guma assigns to literature is completely different from the ideological function that Ndebele's realist project envisages.

LITERATURE, LIFE AND IDEOLOGY

Alex La Guma had already written a number of short stories as well as three novels when he started writing essays on literature. For this reason these essays may perhaps be regarded as a reaffirmation of the theory that informs La Guma's writing of his own works. The issue of whether in reality La Guma's theory is compatible with his practice, is, however, a different matter. Suffice it to say here that, although these essays were not written primarily as a series of studies in aesthetics - but are drawn from various sources such as conference papers, interviews, extended reviews of other artists' work and essays in response to particular theoretical positions adopted by other artists - they, nevertheless, help to provide some indication of the central thrust of La Guma's aesthetics. My intention here is to explore the ambiguities and complexities of La Guma's aesthetic position by showing how they are a result not only of his Marxist beliefs but also of his indebtedness to Russian realist aesthetics (particularly Gorky's) rather than to Lukacs.

If there is one aspect which emerges clearly in La Guma's aesthetics, it is his expressed conviction that the social world is not only knowable but can also be represented "as it is". In an interview with Cecil Abrahams, La Guma made the following comment with regard to his writing: "...when I portray the life of South Africa I try to show it as it actually is" ("The Real Picture" 29). "Life", La Guma argues elsewhere, is "the stimulation of artistic endeavour" ("Culture and Liberation" 50). Indeed in all his extra-fictional statements La Guma has articulated this belief in the potentiality of fiction to capture the quality of human life in its profundity. This view is epitomised in the often quoted statement made by La Guma at the Afro-Asian Writers' Conference in Moscow in 1968: "One cannot separate literature from life, from human experience and human aspirations" ("Literature and Life" 238). It is this belief in the inseparability of literature and life which is central to La Guma's aesthetics.

La Guma's belief in the inseparability of literature and life, one may argue, should not come as a surprise. As a member of the Communist Party La Guma was expected, among other things, to subscribe to a materialist conception of the world in terms of which the source of all events and actions is to be found in material causes - in real life. (It should however be added that not all empiricists are Marxists.) It could therefore hardly be expected that he would provide an idealist explanation of the source of fiction. It is therefore no coincidence that La Guma's works draw on the author's observation of life around him. In an essay written for the *Literary Gazette* in Moscow in 1980, in which La Guma makes comments on his own writing and political work, he makes this clear: "I had seen many things around me which had never been dealt with in South African creative writing, and I was convinced that this was real material for a writer" ("To *Literary Gazette*" 37). It was on the basis of his observations, then, that La Guma hoped to "portray truthfully the lives" of people who are the subject of his fiction.

La Guma's conception of the relationship between literature and life, and the explanation that he provides of the nature of this relationship, are clearly suggestive of his indebtedness to the fundamentals of Marxist theory. This can clearly be seen in the following statement made by La Guma at the Afro-Asian Writers' Congress in Tashkent in the Soviet Union in 1975 : "When we talk of the relationship between art and life, we mean that unity between what is reflected and the manner in which it is reflected, and this is the quintessence of art" ("Culture and Liberation" 50). What immediately comes to mind as one reads this statement is Lenin's reflectionist theory of literature which is also endorsed by the middle-period Georg Lukacs. One is in fact tempted to suggest that there are obvious shades of Lukacs in this statement, as can most obviously be seen in the underlying belief that art "reflects" social reality, a crucial aspect in the Marxist theory of realism. It will, however, be shown that La Guma's view of the relationship between literature and life is defined in non-problematic terms, which distinguishes it from the Leninist model of reflection in terms of which literature is not simply a crude reflection of reality but its mirror in which contradictions and ambiguities are embodied.

Although it is believed that La Guma may have had access to the writings of Lukacs on the theory of realism at some stage in his literary career - a belief largely based on the knowledge that La Guma read widely, especially when it came to Marxist theory - there is no substantial evidence in any of his essays to suggest that Lukacs's works may have had a direct impact on his aesthetics.⁷ What is clear, however, is that La Guma read the writings of Maxim Gorky, the Russian pre-revolutionary author who since the 1934 congress of the Union of Writers became known as the father of socialist realism, and that this writer's theories on literature had a profound impact on La Guma's aesthetics. As La Guma himself acknowledged in his 1968 address to the delegates of the Afro-Asian Writers' Congress: "When we talk of literature in its true sense, we

cannot exclude the contributions of Gorky. Maxim Gorky wrote a vast amount about literature" ("Literature and Life" 237). It is therefore no coincidence that La Guma makes frequent reference to Gorky in redefining and defending his aesthetics in some of his essays.

In his 1968 address to the Afro-Asian Writers' Congress La Guma draws extensively on Gorky's essay written on the occasion of the establishment of World Literature Publishers in 1919.⁸ He begins his address by quoting at length Gorky's definition of literature which reads in part:

Literature is the heart of the world; all the joys and sorrows, dreams and hopes, despairs and wreaths of it, all the emotions of man as he faces beauties of nature, all his terrors as he faces nature's secrets, lend it wings... One might call literature also the all seeing eye of the world, an eye whose glances pierce the deepest secrets of the human spirit... [All] literary creation in prose or in verse shares the unity of the emotions, thoughts and ideas common to all men, the unity of the sacred striving of man towards happiness and freedom of the spirit, the unanimous hope for better forms of life. ("Literature and Life" 237)

La Guma quotes Gorky at length here not only to reaffirm his belief in the inseparability of literature and life, but also to endorse what Lukacs has called Gorky's "humanist conception of the mission of literature" (*Studies in European Realism* 218) - that is, the notion that literature has to facilitate the progress of humanity. Accordingly, La Guma argues:

Literature, art, culture, civilisation, these are not abstract conceptions as some would imagine. They define the direction and basis of our actions at a particular time. They must therefore be understood and interpreted in their revolutionary paths as the ethos which drives man forward or retards his progress according to the dynamism of that civilisation. (239)

The key phrases here are "define the direction and basis of our action at a particular time" and

"the ethos which drives man forward or retards his progress according to the dynamism of that civilisation". For they cogently capture Lukacs's theory of realism in terms of which a socio-historical perspective is crucial to realist fiction's depiction of society as a progressive force. It is by being rooted in socio-historical reality that literature performs its function, which is, according to La Guma, to raise the consciousness of the readers to the vitality of life. Following Gorky, therefore, La Guma argues: "One of the greatest values of literature is that by deepening our consciousness, widening our feeling for life, it reminds us that all ideas and all actions derive from realism and experience within social realities" (238).

The idea of the indissoluble link between literature and life recurs in La Guma's essays and in different ways demonstrates some affinity between La Guma's ideas and Gorky's. Nowhere, however, is Gorky's influence on La Guma's aesthetics more pronounced than in the latter's provocative essay, "Alexander Solzhenitsyn : `Life through a crooked eye'" - arguably the most significant essay in terms of one's understanding not only of La Guma's aesthetics but also of his politics. For one thing, La Guma not only defends the Soviet Union and its socialist practices (during the 1960s and 70s) but most significantly he also employs Gorky to reaffirm his commitment to the aesthetics of realism in general and declare his unequivocal support for socialist realism in particular. But, for the moment, the question is: what prompts La Guma, an avowed South African Marxist, to write an essay on Alexander Solzhenitsyn, a dissident Soviet writer and a vociferous critic of Stalin and the Soviet leadership in 1940s who was arrested, kept in prison camps, exiled, a writer who not only denounced socialist realism but ultimately repudiated Soviet society, Marxism and socialism and became a convert to Christianity?

La Guma's essay was primarily prompted by the publication of Solzhenitsyn's Nobel Prize Lecture

of 1972 by the *South African Outlook*, a local journal associated with the missionary establishment, which through its control of Lovedale Press made publications by black writers accessible to readers. La Guma sees the publication of this lecture by *South African Outlook* as a demonstration of this journal's complicity in the "anti-communist and anti-Soviet campaign" (69) waged by the Nobel Committee. La Guma questions the criterion used by the Nobel Committee in awarding the Nobel Prize for Literature to Solzhenitsyn in 1972 and, having provided several examples of writers who deserved the prize but never gained it, accuses the Nobel Committee of using the Nobel Prize "as an act in the 'cold war'" (78). La Guma goes on to argue:

The award of the prize to Alexander Solzhenitsyn in 1970 came only as a logical conclusion of the Nobel Committee's policy not so much on the merits of the literature, as on its attitude to the Soviet Union, to the ideas of socialism. (78)

By making a comparison of the reception of Solzhenitsyn's fiction in the Western mass media, on the one hand, and that of the Soviet Union on the other hand - the former bestowing accolades on Solzhenitsyn for his "talent" and the latter complaining about his "obsession with prison-camps" and his distortion of Soviet life (76) - La Guma seeks to demonstrate that Solzhenitsyn's works "show that he is far from concerned with the realities of Soviet life" (77). Against this background, then, La Guma concludes: "Seeing Soviet life through a crooked eye got him the Nobel Prize for 1970" (77).

It is not our concern here to comment on the demerits or merits of Solzhenitsyn's fiction. What is important for us is rather to point out that La Guma's scathing attack on the ideological content of Solzhenitsyn's fiction and the Nobel Committee's award of the Nobel Prize to this Soviet dissident writer provide ample evidence of La Guma's unwavering support for the Soviet Union

and his uncompromising adherence to socialist ideology. This is best exemplified in the following statement La Guma made with regard to Solzhenitsyn's fiction:

to give the impression that prison-camps form the general experience of Soviet people is, to say the least, a gross distortion of the realities of Soviet life. No honest person who has visited the Soviet Union can claim that he experienced the atmosphere of oppression, concentration camps and secret police as Solzhenitsyn would have it. The common problems of the Soviet Union people today are those concerned with the transition from socialism to communism, and that is what most writers in the USSR are concerned with. (74)

It was perhaps this attitude towards the Soviet Union that prompted Lewis Nkosi, who was with La Guma during the latter's first visit there in 1968, to allege:

Alex La Guma is a man fiercely and humourlessly committed to his ideology - communism. I was surprised to discover how conservative and uncritical he was in his commitment. Indeed there are many independent Marxist thinkers who would be irritated by his brand of pious regard for everything Soviet policy-makers are doing as almost beyond any questioning. ("Alex La Guma: The Man and His Work" 110)

To back up his argument Nkosi cites La Guma's "implicit endorsement" of the trial of two Soviet writers, Yuli Daniel and Andrei Sinyavsky, who had been prosecuted for smuggling their manuscripts out of the country. For Nkosi, on the contrary, it was "strange" that, in his words, "any artist interested in creative freedom, least of all (La Guma)...who had himself been prosecuted and his works proscribed" (110), would adopt such an attitude towards the fate of the other writers.⁹ La Guma's critique of Solzhenitsyn six years later can therefore be seen in the context of La Guma's general attitude to the critics of the Soviet Union in general and dissident writers in particular.

The most crucial part of La Guma's essay on Solzhenitsyn for our purposes here is his critique of Solzhenitsyn's Nobel Lecture itself entitled, "The Role of Writers in Society". For it is precisely Solzhenitsyn's aesthetics, and his conception of the role of a writer, which eventually become the main target of La Guma's critique. Briefly summarised, for Solzhenitsyn art is of divine origin: "there are no doubts about its foundations...we received it from Hands we were unable to see", he argues (Solzhenitsyn 142). As Richard Waugh points out, then, Solzhenitsyn's "vision of the source of art and value is ultimately rooted in his belief in the absolute" (Waugh 175). Although Solzhenitsyn explains the source of art in spiritual (idealist) terms he insists on the responsibility of a writer to his society. He is, however, quite emphatic on the freedom of the artist: "Let us concede that the artist *owes* nothing to anyone..." (145). Implicit in his emphasis on the freedom of the artist is his rejection of writers having to play a politically partisan role by espousing a particular ideology. This is a clear demonstration of Solzhenitsyn's condemnation of the officially sanctioned practice of socialist realism with its emphasis on the exaltation of the heroic figures of the revolution. According to Solzhenitsyn, the writer has a moral rather than a political responsibility to his community and this is in line with the mystical terms in which the origin of art is explained in Solzhenitsyn's aesthetics. In Solzhenitsyn's own words: "The writer is not an outside judge of his compatriots and contemporaries, but an accomplice in all the evil perpetrated in his country or by his people" (147).

La Guma interrogates Solzhenitsyn's mystical or idealist conception of the origins of art. He points out that for Solzhenitsyn art is something that is "above, separate from, people" and then argues, if it is true that "we received [art] from Hands we were unable to see" (as Solzhenitsyn suggests), therefore "we must conclude that even if there was no humanity, no mankind, no people on earth, Art could still be there" ("Life Through a Crooked Eye" 70). Instead, La Guma

offers a materialist explanation of the origins of art, arguing that all art "came from human endeavour". "If talent was not exercised, then we would not have art", La Guma argues (70). Having said this, La Guma reiterates his belief in the indivisible link between literature and life and employs Gorky to back up his argument: "What the imagination creates is prompted by the facts of real life, and it is not governed by baseless fantasy, divorced from life, but very real causes..."(71). On this basis, therefore, we may conclude that La Guma turns to Gorky primarily because he shares with Gorky a materialist conception of the world from which the idea of the inseparability of literature and life stems.

The assertion from Gorky (cited above) leads La Guma to the following definition of art: "art is a representation of life" (71). If art is a "representation of life" as La Guma suggests, then, what is the role of the artist? For La Guma, the task of the "real artist [is to search] for truth and to depict [that] truth" (75). This conception of the task of the writer has some affinity to Lukacs's theory in so far as it is suggestive of La Guma's heavy reliance on the honesty of the writer in his pursuit of "truth" - and, as such, would seem to downplay the role of ideology in this pursuit. For Lukacs, following Marx and Engels, the honesty of the writer, we know, means portraying "reality as it actually is" even if, in the process, one has to transcend one's "most cherished preconceptions and most intimate personal aspirations" (*Writer and Critic* 84). This is where La Guma parts company with Lukacs: for La Guma, the search for truth is consistent with and perhaps too closely linked with the principle of partisanship of literature as espoused by Lenin in "Party Organisation and Party Literature". For this reason, La Guma expands his definition of art:

But, further, art is a representation of life also modified by the personality of the artist; for the artist has a character, an outlook on life, the world around him, and through his art he hopes to modify the personality of others. ("Life through a

crooked eye" 71)

Once again, La Guma's indebtedness to Marxist aesthetics of realism can be seen not only in his definition of art as a reflection of social reality but also in his acknowledgement of the role of ideology in this representation of reality. However, La Guma's use of the term, 'personality' instead of ideology could be seen as rendering visible the (at times) *ad hoc* nature of his theory.

La Guma's conceptualisation of the role of ideology in literature, one suspects, is attributable to his interpretation of Lenin's principle of partisanship as well as his somewhat mechanistic version of the theory of reflection. Earlier, in this essay, La Guma employs Gorky in reaffirming his belief in the Aristotelian dictum, "Man is *zoon politikon*", which, according to Lukacs, is central to realist aesthetics, as indicated earlier. Later, in the same essay, La Guma reiterates his conception of the relationship between literature and life as well as the consciousness-raising function of literature: "Literature and art not only reflect the life of the people, but they also help mould the human mind" (74). He then goes on to argue:

The idea of the individual link of literature and art with the interests and struggle of social classes and, in socialist society, with the life of the entire people, was theoretically substantiated by Lenin who propounded the principle of partisanship of literature. Artistic creation cannot remain outside the struggle of classes, outside politics; for each writer, whether he likes to or not, expresses in his work the interest of some one class. (74)

While one endorses the notion that "artistic creation" is socio-historically determined and can therefore not remain completely "outside politics", one would be sceptical of the argument that a work of art is always an expression of an author's class interest or ideology, as implied in this assertion.¹⁰ In his "Ideology and Literary Form - a comment" Francis Mulhern points out that the

ideological status of the text is not determined by its origin but by its objective function and for that reason textual ideology might even be inconsistent with authorial ideology (85). Nevertheless, the significance of this assertion, however platitudinous, is that it clearly spells out La Guma's belief (despite humanist traces in his vocabulary) in the ideological function of literature, a belief to which La Guma makes consistent reference in his extra-fictional statements.

There is a clear agenda in La Guma's adoption of Lenin's principle of the partisanship of literature and it is to embrace socialist realism. Accordingly, La Guma begins by castigating "bourgeois propagandists" who "attack this principle, trying to prove that to serve the interests of a definite class is incompatible with artistic creation". To back up his argument he refers to what he calls "the clatter of innocuous and trivial reading matter produced in the West which helps to divert the masses from more serious aspects of life" and wonders whose interests "the writers of such material serve" (74). In contrast, La Guma argues, the socialist system is the first system which "freed culture from the influence of the money-bags" by "affording the artist a chance not to pander to the tastes of a small coterie of the 'cultured' but for the masses" (75). The argument ends on a high note, with La Guma defending and embracing socialist realism:

Each real artist searches for the truth, seeks to depict the truth. But this is what socialist society is also interested in. The main demand of socialist realism is to portray life truthfully in its progressive development. (75)

The first statement ("Each real artist searches for the truth...") is curiously interesting in the sense that it is as if La Guma responds to a statement Solzhenitsyn is quoted as having made with regard to socialist realism elsewhere: "All have agreed, whatever their subject and material may be, to leave unspoken the main truth, the truth that stares you in the eye even without literature. It is

this vow to abstain from the truth that is called Socialist Realism", Ronald Hingley quotes Solzhenitsyn as having said (Hingley 203). It clearly turns out, then, that La Guma makes use of Lenin's principle of partisanship in order to endorse socialist realism and, thereby, challenge Solzhenitsyn's discourse.

Significantly, it was in the name of Lenin's principle of partisanship that the (official) Zhdanovite version of socialist realism was proclaimed in the Soviet Union after the debates of the 1930s. Zhdanov is quoted as having said of Soviet literature:

Our Soviet literature is not afraid of the charge of being "tendentious". Yes, Soviet literature is tendentious, for in an epoch of class struggle there is not and cannot be a literature which is not class literature, and tendentious, allegedly nonpolitical. And I think that every one of our Soviet writers can say to any dull-witted bourgeois, to any philistine, to any bourgeois who may talk of being tendentious: "Yes, our Soviet literature is tendentious and we are proud of this fact, because the aim of our tendency is to liberate the toilers, to free all mankind from the yoke of capitalist slavery. (Quoted in Robin 56)

As can clearly be seen, there are striking parallels between the Zhdanovite version of "tendentiousness" and La Guma's interpretation of Lenin's principle of partisanship, as articulated in his article on Solzhenitsyn.

It is perhaps necessary at this point to explore another dimension of La Guma's aesthetics of realism which seems to me to provide a clue to La Guma's recourse to the principle of partisanship. Apart from Gorky, it would seem that La Guma's aesthetics of realism also has a great deal to do with George Plekhanov, whose early contribution to the realist debate in Russia received critical attention in the 1930s. There is ample evidence that La Guma read both Plekhanov's *Unaddressed Letters, Art and Social Life* and appropriated some of Plekhanov's ideas

by incorporating them into his own discourse.

In his essay, "Has Art Failed South Africa?", for example, which appeared in the *African Communist* in 1977, La Guma employs Plekhanov in his endorsement of ideologically oriented artistic production. He points out in his critique of the art for art's sake school of thought in South Africa:

The black artist in South Africa is not averse to mixing his work with 'politics'; he cannot but accept that as one of the victims of the oppressive society, his work almost automatically becomes involved...for us or the conscious artist, man is not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for man - society is not made for the artist, but the artist for society. The function of art is to assist the development of man's consciousness, to help improve society. (82)

He then goes on to attack those artists who reject a utilitarian view of art citing Plekhanov's argument "Art for art's sake arises essentially where the artist is out of harmony with his social environment..." (83). He accuses these artists of being in "ivory towers" taking "refuge from the slings and arrows of an outrageous society" (82). La Guma's essay was written as a rejoinder to Cecil Skotnes, a South African artist, who had expressed his concern about what he saw as "a singular lack of guts" in South African art despite the existence of what he described (in 1976) as "a classic revolutionary situation" that could stimulate a proliferation of artistic production. In his argument Skotnes had particularly singled out what he perceived as a "lack of a strong artistic tradition" on "the Black Front" and expressed his reservations about the merit of art that is "bound to ...political institutions in general". As can be inferred it is precisely with these particular aspects of Skotnes's argument that La Guma takes issue and recruits Plekhanov to make a case for black artists.

Plekhanov's contribution to realist aesthetics in Russia is best epitomised by Regine Robin in her provocative study interestingly entitled *Socialist Realism : An Impossible Aesthetic* in which she traces the origins of socialist realisms and underscores its contradictions:

for Plekhanov, art is a socio-historical phenomenon, a thought, an idea, a content, something to express, something that is expressed through images. It is a reflection of reality, anchored in its time, which attains perfection when the relation between form and content is maximally adequate. (150)

Plekhanov distinguishes between those artists who perceive art in terms of their responsibility to society, those who argue that the function of art is to assist the development of man's consciousness, to improve the social system, on the one hand, and those who see art as an end in itself on the other (Plekhanov 149). He then uses various examples from different historical contexts to test the viability of these two opposing views. Plekhanov's investigation leads him to the following conclusion on the art for art's sake school of thought: "The belief in art for art's sake arises when artists and people keenly interested in art are hopelessly out of harmony with their social environment" (163). On the contrary, the utilitarian view of art

that is, the tendency to impart to its production the significance of judgments on the phenomenon of life, and the joyful eagerness, which always accompanies it, to take part in social strife, arises and spreads whenever there is mutual sympathy between a considerable section of society and people who have more or less active interest in creative art. (163)

As can be inferred from these statements, the validity of Plekhanov's thesis lies in its attempt to demystify the terms of these opposing perspectives on art by locating them in historical contexts or social conditions within which they thrive. Plekhanov's achievement in this regard is cogently captured by Robin:

Art for art's sake is always the sign of retreat from the social: one needs to analyse why this retreat from the social, historically speaking, imposes itself on certain artists. That is why Plekhanov abandons the "social utility" of art as an immanent principle. In so doing he creates a considerable shift in what we have called the discursive base of realist aesthetics: he opens up an ambiguity, a shadowy zone that, in conjunction with his rejection of prescription in art, would suffice to explain why he was blacklisted as a Menshevik and as the creator of a passive aesthetic in the Soviet society of the 1930s. (150).

It could perhaps be argued that it is precisely because of Plekhanov's rejection of "prescription in art" that La Guma takes recourse in Lenin's principle of partisanship in art - as will be shown later.

In all his extra-fictional statements La Guma persistently denounces the art for art's sake argument and espouses a utilitarian view of art. This is best exemplified in the following statement made by La Guma in 1971:

It is perhaps possible, within the environment of developed societies, to create with a certain amount of confidence the impression that the art, culture, the level of civilisation of a people have nothing, or little to do with socio-economic and political forces within these societies; that culture has nothing to do with politics. In South Africa this is not possible. The proposition of art for the sake of art finds no foothold in the atmosphere of racism, violence and crude exploitation which is the day-to-day experience of the South African people. ("The Condition of Culture in South Africa" 113)

What is particularly striking here is not so much La Guma's rejection of art for art's sake proposition and the way in which he embraces a utilitarian view of art by underscoring the inseparability of culture and politics, but it is the fact that there is an element of tentativeness with regard to his use of these two positions in this statement. In short, there is an unarticulated assumption that in a post-apartheid society, under a different historical or social setting, there will be a shift from the contemporary discursive position. Indeed, this seems to be confirmed towards

the end of the essay:

As long as racism and oppression last in Southern Africa, culture will take this form. When the oppressed have freed themselves from the shackles of economic, social and political limitations, flowers will bloom anew in an environment of happiness in a life lived in dignity, a life of freedom and comradeship among our peoples. (120)

It would seem, then, that La Guma has fully gasped Plekhanov's argument that the "social utility of art" is not "an immanent principle" and that he agrees with Plekhanov's thesis in general.

However, as Henri Arvon points out, Plekhanov "refuses to put art and literature in the service of party politics..." (Arvon 14). This is where La Guma parts company with Plekhanov and, instead, embraces Lenin's principle of partisanship in literature. It is perhaps not surprising that La Guma should subscribe to Lenin's principle of partisanship in literature when one considers that La Guma served his apprenticeship (as a writer) as a reporter under the auspices of *New Age*, a politically partisan newspaper that was not only "run by [Communist Party] members [and] consistently reflected party policy [but whose] position on international matters was [also] virtually indistinguishable from the foreign policy of the Soviet Union" (Forman and Odendaal *A Trumpet from the Housetops* XXII). Significantly, it was apparently with regard to Party publications that Lenin wrote his famous paper on partisanship, "Organisation and Party Literature" in 1905. However, one may argue that La Guma, like his counterparts in the Soviet Union in the 1930's, extends Lenin's principle of partisanship to include creative works of literature. This can be seen most obviously in La Guma's argument that one "cannot of course separate one's social and political allegiances from one's creative work" (Grant 49). It would seem, therefore, that La Guma subscribes to Plekhanov's aesthetic in so far as it is compatible with

his liberation discourse and that, where the question of tendentiousness is concerned, La Guma does not seem to distinguish between his works and his political allegiances. This does not, however, mean that in La Guma's works the political message which conforms to his political allegiances is always explicitly stated - and, in this sense, his practice would seem to be at odds with his theory.

The concept of tendentiousness in La Guma's aesthetics is linked to his belief in the ideological function of literature, a belief to which La Guma makes consistent reference. For example, in his interview with Cecil Abrahams he describes the role of the writer in this way:

A writer, if he is conscious of what is going on around him, automatically reflects [the real picture]...and through portraying the life around him also produces his own ideas about it. Of course, what should be borne in mind is that a writer is supposed to be conscious of the direction in which his works are going to point...I think that it is the role of the conscious writer to guide the morals, the perspectives and objectives of the community. ("The Real Picture" 20)

In La Guma's view, then, a writer is not only a chronicler of the experiences of his community but he is also an ideologue providing guidance to the perspectives of the community. It is against this background, then, that La Guma expresses the intended ideological effect of his writing of *And A Threefold Cord* in these words:

When I write in a book that somewhere in South Africa poor people have no water but must buy it by the bucketful from some local exploiter then I also entertain the secret hope that when somebody reads it he will be moved to do something about those robbers who have turned my country into a material and cultural wasteland for the majority of the inhabitants. ("Literature and Life" 237)

As can be inferred from this statement, in La Guma's terms, it is not enough for literature to depict

the social situation truthfully, but, in addition, the ideological effect of literature should be to transform the consciousness of the readers even to the extent of spurring them on to engage in some form of action! It would seem, then, that it is for this purpose that La Guma turns to social realism as an effective means of conscientizing his readership.

The significance which La Guma attaches to the ideological function of literature and the concept of tendentiousness can also be seen in his literary criticism. This is best exemplified in La Guma's critical essay on Nadine Gordimer's *The Black Interpreters - Notes on African Writing*. In the first section of this work entitled "Modern African Fiction in English", Nadine Gordimer makes a critical assessment of African literature written in English which she sees as beginning with the Negritude movement. She then distinguishes between African writers who are "testifiers to social change" - those who merely provide a "sort of context of expression, of bald background fact" (Gordimer 8-9) and those who write "literature" in which the quality of the writing matters. Having made a critical appraisal of some literary texts by such writers as Achebe, Ngugi, Ayi Kweyi Armah and others, Gordimer concludes that African English literature's best writers are critical realists in the Lukacsian sense - establishing a link between the past and pointing towards the future - and that this is the direction in which African literature is developing (32).

In response, La Guma takes issue with Gordimer's exclusive treatment of English literature written by Africans and her measuring of them against European standards. He describes this special treatment of African literature as "literary apartheid", a practice which, in his view, results in the construction of "a cultural Bantustan" (Gala, "Against Literary Apartheid" 103, 102). According to La Guma, Gordimer's reservations on the "testifiers to social change" are due to these authors' "giving too much attention to social issues". But, La Guma argues, "softening

the social impact has never guaranteed success for any work of art" (105). What is crucial in La Guma's terms is rather the ideological commitment of the writer and the extent to which his writings contribute to human progress. In his words:

The writer's participation in the development of life is measured by the ideological artistic level of his work, the depth of his depiction of events and problems. The writer must find the epicentre of events and determine his place in them, his point of view. Then he will find application for his talent and personal experience and will worthily serve the cause of aesthetic and social progress. There are writers who work in a kind of vacuum, who stand apart from events, who do not maintain close ties with the truth of their ethos, their source of inspiration. An atmosphere of vacuum cannot stimulate works that contribute towards the common progressive character of life and literature... We are witnessing how the cultural heritage of Africa is transformed into modern, social and political orientated literatures and the arts. This is one of the most important tasks of the mentioned cultural revolution and a stirring event in modern and progressive world culture. (103-104)

According to this view, then, the writer's credibility as a craftsman, and, one may add, the literary value of his work, depend largely on the ideological effect of the cultural product - hence La Guma's belief that socially and politically oriented African literature contributes towards a cultural revolution. Implicit in La Guma's criticism of writers whose works are not based on a concrete ideological basis, those "who work in a kind of vacuum, who stand apart from events, who do not maintain close ties with the truth of their ethos, their source of inspiration", is his endorsement of the principle of partisanship in literature.

The fact that the principle of partisanship in La Guma's aesthetics is closely linked to socialist realism (as stated earlier) can most obviously be seen in La Guma's somewhat negative response to Nadine Gordimer's labelling of the best African writers as critical realists. In an argument that reveals La Guma's lack of familiarity with Lukacs, La Guma accuses Gordimer of failing to

address the question of the main trends of development of African English literature "in terms of African reality" (106). La Guma continues to argue:

Instead [Gordimer] borrows from Georg Lukacs a formula which asserts "critical realism as not only the link with the great literature of the past, but also the literature that points to the future". And so she concludes with amazing aplomb "there seems to me little doubt that African English literature's best writers are critical realists, and that this is the direction in which literature is developing... But African development and African literature have not come to a full stop." (106)

La Guma's objection to Gordimer is somewhat puzzling: implicit in his argument is the suggestion that African literature should be assessed "in terms of African reality" rather than through a heavy reliance on critical theories of (foreigners such as) Lukacs. Leaving aside the question of assessing African literature "in terms of African reality", La Guma's argument would seem to me to render visible two factors with regard to his aesthetics. Firstly, it indicates La Guma's lack of awareness of Lukacs's seminal contribution to Marxist aesthetics of realism to which La Guma himself obviously subscribes. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, La Guma's argument here is suggestive of his somewhat ambiguous attitude towards being categorised as a critical realist - La Guma is amongst those African writers who are seen by Gordimer as creating an African literature, the critical realists. Unlike the "testifiers" who "take stock-in-trade abstractions of human behaviour and look about for a dummy to dress them in" (19), Gordimer argues that La Guma's protagonists in *District Six* (as seen in *A Walk in the Night*) "do not talk about inequality" instead they "bear its weals" (29). Nevertheless, in La Guma's assertion that African development and African literature have not come to a full stop there is an implied indication that African literature should not be defined within the confines of critical realism.

Why does La Guma object to being labelled a critical realist? La Guma's 1974 essay (also written under the pseudonym Gala), in which he examines Athol Fugard's oeuvre, may provide some clues. In this essay La Guma argues that in Fugard's plays there is "an ever-present concentration on experimentation and technical innovation" and he sees in this regard evidence of Samuel Beckett's influence on Fugard ("Hello or Goodbye, Athol Fugard?" 102). Not surprisingly La Guma is quick to point out that it is nevertheless "the content of Fugard's work which must certainly "reveal the real man" " (102). For La Guma is not so much interested in Fugard's dramatic devices as he is in the ideological orientation of the content of his works which, he hopes, will "reveal the real man" - a reading that would seem to reveal La Guma's conflation of textual ideology with authorial ideology. La Guma's only comment on Fugard's early plays, *No-good Friday* and *Nongogo*, is that they are "naturalistic tragedies set in Johannesburg black townships - and staged with African casts" (102-102). *The Blood Knot*, which seems to gain La Guma's tacit approval, is seen as being informed by a liberal humanist ideology whose tenets include "the freedom of the individual, abhorrence of colour discrimination and the nightmare of Blacks under apartheid" (103). La Guma finds in some of Fugard's later plays, however, not only "deteriorating symbolism" but also a lack of clear ideological commitment. For La Guma, the government's withdrawal of Fugard's passport in 1967 (which was reissued four years later and accompanied by the South African government's subsidy of his play, *Boesman and Lena*) and Fugard's subsequent withdrawal of his support for the cultural boycott resulted in "the absence of a more concrete response to the realities of the South African scene" (105). Instead, La Guma argues:

Athol Fugard is now the playwright first. It is now enough for him to portray various aspects of life through his skill and talent. He has suffered the fate of South African liberals with their absence of any scientific or consistent attitude

towards the society in which they live and work (104).

“Scientific” is a telling term here in the sense that it is clearly indicative of La Guma’s immersion in Marxist-Leninism. La Guma's attitude to liberal ideology is (deliberately) ambiguous. Although he accuses liberals of their lack of "scientific or consistent attitude" towards their society, he does not expect Fugard to move beyond the confines of his ideology. Athol Fugard, La Guma argues, “need not only be an observer of his country's condition, or as he puts it merely "bear witness", and be a “classic example of the guilt-ridden impotent white liberal of South Africa”. Within the confines of a liberal humanist ideology itself there are prospects for a progressive outlook, La Guma seems to suggest. In La Guma's own words: “An admission of guilt is in itself a step towards personal re-evaluation, and a more profound understanding of his function as an artist” (105).

It may, however, be argued that beneath La Guma's critique of the ideological content of Fugard's plays, lurks his dissatisfaction with a critical realist perspective, which La Guma clearly associates with the liberal humanist ideology that informs Fugard's writing. Liberal humanist literature is seen by La Guma as protest art *par excellence*, it merely negates without making any positive affirmation. In his words: "It is not enough for South African art merely to idealise the negation of the racist way of life. Art must also be warmed by the fires of the struggle for liberty" (104). La Guma's assertion here is clearly reminiscent of Gorky's critique of critical realism as epitomised in a statement made in 1934:

The realism of the bourgeois's "prodigal sons" was a critical realism. But while exposing the cankers of society...critical realism could not show people the way out of this thralldom. It was easy to criticise everything, but there was nothing to assert except the obvious senselessness of such social existence and "life in

general". ("A Talk With Young Writers" 303)

The parallels are indeed striking. It would seem then, that, beneath La Guma's ambiguous attitude towards critical realism lies his aspiration towards socialist realism of which his literary mentor, Gorky, is known to be a leading exponent.

To sum up, then, my argument is that if there is any convergence between La Guma's aesthetics of realism and that of Lukacs this has a lot to do with La Guma's absorption of Gorky's theories on literature rather than the possibility of La Guma having read Lukacs's writings on the theory of realism at a particular point in his career. La Guma's reading and admiration of Gorky's fiction, which eventually led to a development of La Guma's interest in Gorky's aesthetics of realism, and his apprenticeship in the Communist Party-linked newspaper, *New Age*, which helped establish La Guma's position as both a social historian and an ideologue, both converge and coincide to produce La Guma's realist aesthetics. At one level, then, La Guma's aesthetics draws extensively on what Robin has identified as the shifts and displacements in "the discursive base of the Russian realist aesthetics" (109) - as can clearly be seen, not only in his use of the Marxist theory of reflection but also in his employment of Plekhanov's conception of the utilitarian view of art, which La Guma links to Lenin's principle of partisanship as a way of incorporating it in his own discourse. At another level, however, one may argue, following Robin, that, like Gorky, La Guma leans on that Russian "realist discursive base and plugs into it" the concept of tendentiousness, "the primacy of the political over the aesthetic, not only of content over form", in a word, the concept of ideological didacticism that underpins the socialist realist aesthetic. The question that still remains, however, is : Is La Guma's obvious endorsement of socialist realism translated into practice in his fiction?

NOTES

1. La Guma is known to have read works by these authors (See "Real Picture" 18). Nkosi ("Alex La Guma: The Man and His Work", 112) speculates that La Guma's style may owe a lot to "a naturalist like Zola...."
2. Chandromohan correctly argues that La Guma's narrative method shifts from being naturalistic to a "more overt allegoric/symbolic method in his late works" (*A Study in Trans-ethnicity in South Africa: The Writings of Alex La Guma* 31).
3. See for example Coetzee's "Man's Fate" (345), Bernth Lindfors ("Robin Hood Realism in South African English Fiction" 18) and Mphahlele ("Tribute to La Guma" 9).
4. Coetzee, however, does not share the idea that the naturalistic-deterministic element in La Guma's fiction goes hand in hand with pessimism. See "Alex La Guma and the Responsibilities of the South African Writer" 10-11).
5. See, for example, Roger Sherman Loomis ("A Defence of Naturalism" 543-544) and Leopoldo Alas ("What Naturalism is Not" 268-269).
6. Malcolm Cowley's argument that the distinction between the naturalist and Marxist novelists or proletarian writers is that the former depict changes that are the result of "laws and forces and tendencies beyond human control" while the latter believed that "men acting together could make a new world" ("A Natural History of American Naturalism" 446) would seem pertinent here. Gareth Cornwell also argues along these lines in his discussion of La Guma's "naturalism" ("Protest in Fiction : An Approach to Alex La Guma" 114-115).

7. Brian Bunting was not certain that La Guma read the writing of Lukacs but speculated that he might have because he read a lot Marxist literary theory including the writings of Christopher Caudwell.
8. See “Vsemirnaya Literatura “(World Literature)” in Gorky’s *On Literature* (153).
9. Solzhenitsyn has since returned to Russia and, in a dramatic turn of events, in an article which appeared in *Moscow News* (22 February 1987) it was reported that the trial of Sinyavsky and Daniel was “now officially viewed as a mistake” (See Anon. “Staggering admission” in *Index on Censorship* 5 1987, 1-5).
10. La Guma may be paraphrasing Gorky’s argument here: “A writer is the eyes, ears and voice of his class. He perceives, formulates and portrays the sentiments, desires, worries, hopes, passions, interests, vices and virtues of his class, his group” (“The aims of our Journal” 272).

CHAPTER 3

JOURNALISM : THE ROOTS OF LA GUMA'S COUNTER DISCOURSE

Alex La Guma, like his contemporary writers in the 1950s, came to fiction writing via journalism. His career in journalism spans the period between 1955 and 1962 when he worked as a reporter and later a columnist for *New Age*. This apprenticeship in journalism provided La Guma with subjects that would later dominate his creative work at an early stage in his writing career. Acknowledging the impact of journalism on his creative writing, La Guma pointed out in a 1984 interview:

I suppose my first inspiration or stimulation to become a writer was when I worked as a journalist for a progressive weekly newspaper in South Africa, *New Age*. On that occasion I was compelled to write a great deal, to report facts and news, to comment on them. In the end it occurred to me that the facts which I was reporting could lead to creative work ("My Books Have Gone Back Home" 71)

By La Guma's own admission, then, there are continuities between his journalism and his fiction, especially in terms of the subjects he dealt with as a reporter. One of the purposes of this chapter is therefore to look at particular subjects, style and strategies in La Guma's journalism, some of which subsequently characterise his fiction and, in a way, provide evidence that his fiction is informed by social realism.

As has been indicated, La Guma is not the only South African writer who gained his apprenticeship this way. The activities, thematic concerns and styles of the "Drum writers" are well documented elsewhere - there is, therefore, no need to discuss them extensively here.¹

Suffice to say that although La Guma wrote one or two short stories for *Drum* magazine in the 1950's as a reporter for *New Age* he was nurtured in an entirely different tradition of journalism from that of the "Drum writers". Unlike *Drum* writers whose journalism was marked by ambivalent political undertones despite their exposés of the injustices of apartheid, La Guma's journalism was firmly entrenched in the Congress tradition of politics and a socialist perspective.² Graeme Addison provides some useful insight into the nature of *Drum* journalism. He argues:

Political involvement by the staff of *Drum* was sharply discouraged...and it was made clear to them that their job as reporters and editors was to serve the township's reading public with popular and colourful fare, not to push policies and views.... What did set this group apart from their activist predecessors and contemporaries in journalism was that they had no sort of political ambitions for themselves; indeed, some eschewed politics altogether. ("Drum Beat" 6-7)

It would seem therefore that the purpose of *Drum* journalism in the 1950's was to entertain and to inform.

In contrast, the radical media such as *New Age* and *Fighting Talk* (another journal for which La Guma occasionally wrote) clearly established a different voice which not only set out to provide an alternative version of social and political realities from that of establishment media and, thereby, create a "counter-hegemonic" consciousness amongst its readership, but was also blatantly politically partisan. *Fighting Talk*, for example, which was established in 1947 as an organ of the Springbok Legion, an ex-service organisation against fascism, "changed hands in 1954 to become an independent monthly review, edited and managed by an independent committee of supporters of the Congress Movement" ("A Great Gap in Your Life" 2). *New Age*, on the other hand, began its life as *Guardian*, a journal of the labour movement launched in 1937 which gradually became "the mouthpiece of the forces in South Africa fighting for national

liberation and socialism, and against racism, capitalism and imperialism” (Bunting, “South African Journalists in the Front Line” 11). The *Guardian* was banned in 1952 because, according to Bunting, “it stood in the way of the apartheid juggernaut” but it kept coming back under different names after each banning - from *Clarion* to *People's World*, *Advance*, *New Age*, and finally, *Spark* (11 - 12).

Not only was *New Age* regarded as an organ of the Congress Movement but it also “consistently reflected (Communist Party) policy and its position in international matters was virtually indistinguishable from the foreign policy of the Soviet Union” (Forman and Odendaal xviii). As Donald Pinnock points out, the Congress aligned media was involved not only in the business of informing its [readership], but in its discursive construction. Embedded in the text were instructions about who, what and how to be with regard to passes, the government and the Congress Alliance (“Writing Left” 17).

It was through such instruction that this media attempted to “segregate itself” from the dominant discourse of apartheid “in order to prosecute its critique” (Terdiman 185). In a word, the Congress aligned media, such as *Fighting Talk* and *New Age*, were clearly meant to provide what Richard Terdiman would call a “counter-discourse” to apartheid. *New Age*, for example, not only attempted to undermine and subvert apartheid discourse through its reports but the text of its editorial policy also projected a socialist system as an alternative to racial capitalism which underpinned apartheid. It is against this background, then, that La Guma’s journalism has to be seen.

The question, however, is: what are the modalities of La Guma’s counter-discourse, his strategies

of subversion of dominant discourse? La Guma's contestation of dominant discourse is largely thematic - not only does La Guma indict apartheid discourse by recording the experiences of the downtrodden and by using satire, especially in his Pampoen-Onder-die-Bos pieces, but also, in some of the vignettes in his column, "Up my Alley", he clearly projects an alternative system, socialism. It is, however, in his role as a chronicler of the world of people marginalised by apartheid that one discerns a continuity between La Guma's journalism and his fiction. For this reason the central thrust of this chapter will be on this role.

CHRONICLER OF THE MARGINALIZED WORLD

La Guma's well known piece "A pick and a shovel" written for *New Age* on August 30, 1956, provides an early indication of La Guma's interest in becoming a social historian of his people.

This is how this piece, which clearly shows La Guma's potential as a good storyteller, begins:

There is a story told among old people which says that one day, many years ago, God summoned White Man and Coloured Man and placed two boxes before them. One box was very big and the other small. God then turned to Coloured Man and told him to choose one of the boxes. Coloured Man immediately chose the bigger and left the other to White Man. When he opened his box Coloured Man found a pick and a shovel inside it. White Man found gold in his box. (3)

La Guma's aim, however, is to look at the reality behind the myth, to provide an account of the socio-economic conditions of the coloured people in South Africa. He begins his account by providing official statistical information on the coloured community in this country. Nevertheless, La Guma is interested in real human beings rather than in statistical information:

Herded into slums, shivering in shanties, scattered along the hillsides, rocking in

buses to housing schemes, living comfortable in bright homes: Frigedaire, His Master's Voice, Edblo. They toil in thousands in big factories and push vegetable barrows, dig up roads and teach in schools, grow flowers and run shops. They steal and sometimes murder, they beg or carry loads from the markets. They drink, curse, make love and beat their wives or cheat their husbands. Heroes and cowards, villains and gentlemen, saints and sinners, people.(3)

Nonetheless, it soon becomes clear where La Guma's interest lies. For the central thrust of La Guma's text is an analysis of the socio-economic situation of the primarily working class section of the coloured community: "In the slums the people huddle, sleeping on staircases and in packed rooms. Everywhere is the smell of stale cooking, sweat and stagnant water". From the onset, then, La Guma is concerned with the appalling conditions of life of the working classes, their abject poverty and the hardships they had to endure. La Guma does not really paint a gloomy picture of this working class community. Instead, he provides snippets of the day to day activities of these township people, ranging from their faith that God will change their fate as articulated in their prayers in church on Sundays, to Saturday nights when they have fun and enjoy themselves dancing in the township hall and, finally, during weekdays when they meet in packed trains on their way to work and discuss a wide range of issues from politics to township gossip.

La Guma's concluding paragraph in "A Pick and a Shovel" is quite remarkable:

The census declares that we are almost one-and-a-quarter million. But if you identify a people, not by names and the colour of their skin, but by hardship and joy, pleasure and suffering, cherished hopes and broken dreams, the grinding monotony of toil without gain, despair and starvation, illiteracy, tuberculosis and malnutrition, laughter and vice, ignorance, genius, superstition, ageless wisdom and undying confidence, love and hatred, then you will have to give up counting. People are like identical books with only different dust jackets. The title and the text are the same.(3)

This is surely much more than an attempt to assert the humanity of the Coloured community.

Instead, through this documentation of the plight of the Coloured people effectively expressed through the use of the catalogue technique, a technique that La Guma was to employ frequently, not only in his journalistic articles but also in his fictional work, he makes an indictment of apartheid. His target in this regard is the ideology of race as the embodiment of apartheid discourse. This is epitomised in the last statement: “People are like identical books with only different dust jackets. The title and the text are the same”.

In a letter to *Cape Standard* in 1939 La Guma’s father argued that Coloureds should make use of the opportunity that “the non-European press” affords “budding authors and poets...to see their early efforts in print”. Jimmy La Guma saw this as “the first step towards the building of a group of Coloured writers” which would help address what he saw as a lack of “a literary tradition among the Coloureds”. His main concern, however, appears to have been to encourage a redressing of the marginalization of the Coloureds through their involvement in writing. The fact that “A Pick and A Shovel” is amongst the first of Alex La Guma’s articles he wrote for *New Age* is thus significant in the light of his father’s concerns. If too much attention has been devoted to “A Pick and a Shovel”, then, it is because this piece of social commentary provides early indications of La Guma’s intention to put the Coloured community on the historical map - an interest that is pursued in his longer fiction. For one of La Guma’s intentions in this piece is to assert the role of Coloureds (in their own right) as participants in history. This can clearly be seen in the following passage:

They went through wars and marched through the muck of France and Belgium. They sweated in Abyssinia, Egypt and Libya and stole the company beer, laughed at the German army and cracked jokes as the dive-bombers hurled steel death at them. Some of them died and the rest came home and shook their heads and wondered what they had fought for.

If the Coloureds have been marginalised in South Africa because their contribution has been considered to be historically peripheral, this brief documentation of international struggles in which Coloureds, like other people all over the world, have been involved is meant to subvert that notion.

In “The Dead End Kids of Hanover Street”, a piece which appeared in *New Age* on 20 September 1956, La Guma’s turns his attention to unemployed coloured youth. Told in the voice of an omniscient narrator, which initially gives it the impression of “objectivity” usually associated with conventional journalism, the narrative is introduced in this way:

From Castle Bridge to Sheppard Street, Hanover Street runs through the heart of District Six and along it one can feel the pulse-beats of society. It is the main artery of the local world of have and have-nots, the prosperous and the poor, the struggling and idle, the weak and the strong. Its colour is in the bright enamel signs, the neon lights, the shop-fronts, the littered gutters and draped washing. Pepsi Cola. Commando cigarettes. Sale Now On. Its life blood is the hawkers bawling their wares above the jazz from the music shops: ‘Artapels, ja. Uiwe, ja’; ragged youngsters leaping on and off the speeding trackless trams with the agility of monkeys; harassed mothers getting in the groceries; shop assistants; the Durango Kids of 1956; and the knots of loungers under the balconies and in the doorways leading up to the dim and mysterious rooms above the rows of shops and cafes.

Once again there is here clear evidence of the catalogue technique as one of the hallmarks of La Guma’s writing. The catalogue technique and the vivid concrete details provided here are used not only to give a sense of place, the locality of Hanover Street, but also to reveal the density of the world of District Six being described here. It is significant to note that the same passage with some changes finds its way into La Guma’s *A Walk in the Night* (7-8). La Guma’s focus is, however, elsewhere.

“The Dead-Ends Kids of Hanover Street” is in fact a good example of what Tom Wolfe calls a journalistic sketch written with the intention of presenting a realistic picture of a character-type rather than telling a story (*The New Journalism* 30). La Guma’s focus in this regard is the unemployed youth, the lumpenproletariat of District Six. He introduces his character types by telling us how people generally associate their attire - “the brass-buttoned caps, the studded belts and the dangling shirt-tails” - with “battle, murder and sudden death”. The narrative continues: “People have come to regard these youngsters with suspicion, and make a detour when coming within sight of them”.

It is part of La Guma’s strategy, however, that we should reserve our judgement until we have had different accounts of the situation of this unemployed youth. Accordingly, the bulk of the narrative is an account of what apparently transpired from La Guma’s interviews with the youth during the course of his investigative journalism on their plight. Their version is that while they are determined to get employed, jobs are not available. One youngster puts it succinctly: “Die country het white supremacy, maar hulle het nie jobs nie”. During the course of the narrative there is a curious shift in point of view from that of the youth to that of an ostensibly detached albeit complacent doctor who attributes the position of the youth to lack of “parental care and affection”. It would seem that this shift has nothing to do with offering a balanced picture in line with the demands of objectivity in journalism for it is, ultimately, with La Guma’s perspective that the reader is made to identify, as the voice of the omniscient narrator is conflated with that of the journalist in the larger part of the narrative, in this way ensuring that focalisation is to the latter’s advantage. La Guma’s point is that youth resort to gangsterism because they are the victims of racial capitalism. As the narrative puts it: “Slums, disease, unemployment, lack of education, the terrible weight of the colour-bar which withholds the finer things of life - all help to grind them

down until many of them become beasts of prey roaming an unfriendly jungle". In this way we are made aware of La Guma's personal involvement in what he reports, his empathy towards the unemployed youth.

John Hollowel's description of new journalism, a phenomenon which gained momentum in America in the 1960s and is usually associated with such authors as Tom Wolfe, Truman Capote and Norman Mailer, might apply to La Guma :

The most important difference between the new journalism and traditional reporting is the writer's changed relationship to the people and the events he depicts. Traditionally, the straight news article is based upon an "objectivity" that requires a commitment to telling both sides of the story, and an impersonality on the part of the journalist characterised by the lack of value judgements and emotionally coloured adjectives.... In sharp contrast to the "objectivity" that the reporter strives for in the standard news article, the voice of the new journalist is frankly subjective; it bears the stamp of his personality...the new journalist records his personal reactions to the people and events that make news.... (*Fact and Fiction* 22)

The points made by Hollowell here are quoted in full because they are pertinent to La Guma's piece, "The Dead-End Kids of Hanover Street". For La Guma, like the new journalist, has no intention (nor does he make any pretence) of being "objective" as can most obviously be seen in his assertion that the youngsters "have been judged without being tried". The intended effect of this assertion is, primarily, to gain the reader's ideological assent so that he/she is also sympathetic towards the plight of the unemployed youth. Perhaps more significantly, this assertion may also be seen as suggestive of a distinction between what John Hellman in his provocative study, *Fables of Fact*, calls "a disguised perspective" of conventional journalism and "an admitted one" (such as La Guma's) which is associated with new journalism (4).

La Guma's role as a chronicler of the world of the lower depths of society, a role he shares with two of his literary models, Maxim Gorky and Jack London, both of whom also had a stint in journalism, started at an early stage in his writing career. For example, it was in his capacity as a journalist that La Guma had interactions with the lumpenproletariat of District Six which resulted in his writing of "The Dead End Kids of Hanover Street". It is, in turn, to this piece that the roots of La Guma's ability to capture the nuances of township patois, and depict the world of the unemployed youth so intimately in *A Walk in the Night*, can be traced. La Guma's encounter with the world of "the down and outs" is also vividly captured in two early articles, "Ten Days in Roeland Street Jail" and "Law of the Jungle". Written in the journalistic genre of exposé both articles focus on the horrifying conditions of life of prisoners in Roeland Street Jail in Cape Town and the bestiality of the people there which stems from those inhuman conditions. Like ordinary newspaper reports, both use the usual format of conventional reporting, namely, "the inverted pyramid" in terms of which "isolated facts are presented in declining order of importance" (Hellman 3), beginning with the lead that introduces the theme of the article. Here is the first paragraph of "Ten Days in Roeland Street Jail" which appeared in *New Age* dated 27 September 1956:

In Roeland Street, Cape Town, with the blue bulk of Table Mountain in the background, stands the mass of brick and stone which is the city jail. In spite of the carefully tended lawns and flowers which front it, this place has never been able to disguise the cold atmosphere about it and none of the periodic statements of prison authorities has succeeded in glorifying its grim record. It is a place where criminals are always punished, but seldom reformed...justice is replaced by fear and fear is not an efficient reformer. (*Liberation Chabalala* 15)

The rest of the narrative is concerned with a revelation of this grim record of Roeland Street Prison based on a step by step narration of Willie Frazer's ten days experience in this domain of

the underworld. It includes the monotonous routine of the prison setup, the appalling conditions of life as exemplified in prisoners' sharing their meals with cockroaches, the treatment meted out to prisoners by the guards and "the law of the jungle" that governs the relationships amongst prisoners themselves.

In "Law of the Jungle" which La Guma wrote for *New Age* of the 4th October 1956 he clearly attributes the conditions of life in Roeland Street Jail to apartheid policies. He informs us:

Crime has no colour-bar, but evidently punishment in South Africa has. In Cape Town's Roeland Street Jail, white hard-labour criminals work sitting on benches made comfortable with cushions, and protected from the weather under long sheds. Stones are transported from Bellville quarries for them to break up inside jail. The vast majority of non-white prisoners work outside, on farms and public buildings in the city. Non-European prisoners are issued with shorts and red flannel shirts... Europeans wear shoes and socks, long trousers, khaki shirts, and in winter receive long-sleeved jerseys. (*Liberation Chabalala* 17)

The comparison is expanded a little further with a detailed cataloguing of meals - food given to white prisoners being more nutritious than that of their African counterparts. This is followed by an accumulation of detail upon detail of prison life that is obviously meant to shock the readers while providing them with insight into this life of "depravity" and "animalism".

La Guma's graphic description of homosexual practices in which the "bestiality" of some of the prisoners is clearly manifest is also intended to have a similar ideological effect:

Shut off for years from normal life men become slaving beasts preying upon their own sex. The young and defenceless men are forced to submit to abnormal relations and are threatened with death or torture if they refuse. The meek are easily conquered and the tougher elements escape only after desperate and savage fights. One husky lifer used to strike terror into his cell-mates. Doomed to spend all his days in jail, he prowled like a savage gorilla in captivity, giving vent to all

the primeval brutalities forced upon him by frustration. (18)

La Guma later found these exposés to be useful material for his creative writing. “Out of Darkness”, a short story set in prison which appeared in *Africa South* of October-December 1957, may be seen as stemming from the interviews that La Guma had with some of the prisoners. The imagery of animalism used in both journalistic articles and the catalogue of members of the underworld (“gangsters, thugs, thieves, torpedoes, hired bullies and killers”) were later to constitute a larger part of the symbolism and the characters of La Guma’s third novel, *The Stone Country*, which is partly a fictional recreation of his own experiences (and that of his fellow inmates) in the same jail a few years later.

The journalism course which La Guma had done through correspondence while working at Caltex, really paid dividends on May 2, 1957 when La Guma was assigned the “Up my Alley” column by his colleagues in *New Age*. La Guma was assigned this column not only as an indication of his colleagues’ recognition of his flair for writing but, it could also be argued, as a reward for his outstanding service as a reporter. In the words of Sonia Bunting, one of his colleagues in *New Age*: “La Guma was given this column because he was seen as a good storyteller and, as an outgoing person, had a lot of contact with readers” (Telephone conversation with author, 31 August 1994). Curiously, La Guma’s assignment as a columnist coincided with his great interest in storytelling and his fledgling development as a creative writer.³ For this reason the pieces written in the “Up My Alley” column provide useful insight with regard to the subjects and style in terms of La Guma’s transition from being a “documenter of fact” to a creative writer. The column afforded La Guma an opportunity to explore a wide range of subjects the result of which was snippets of information on life in Cape Town, working class culture, La

Guma's impressions of life in Johannesburg, the Treason Trial and other topical issues on local and international politics. It is in fact partly as a result of the humorous and satirical pieces which La Guma wrote in this column between 1957 and 1962 that his writing skills began to receive attention.

The socio-economic conditions of the poor Coloured communities continued to be one of La Guma's concerns in "Up My Alley". Writing on the visit of a BBC crew in District Six on 20 June 1957 La Guma describes how the appearance of "the teeming alleys and backstreets, the horrors of Windermere and the general poverty of these parts of South Africa" on British TV screens will overshadow the image of South Africa provided in "glossy magazines like 'South African Panorama' by the State Information Bureau" (*Liberation Chabalala* 103). A week later La Guma wrote on the hardships that people who stay in the pondokkies of the Cape Flats have to endure.

This is how his account begins:

Winter is a trying time for the poor. The rains are awaited with dread, and in the pondokkies scattered throughout the Cape Flats, the families eye their flimsy ceilings with doubt and hope that they will prove strong enough to keep the rain out. (*Liberation Chabalala* 102)

Using a descriptive style which had by now become one of the prominent cornerstones of his craft, La Guma describes a pondokkie as a "bizarre structure consisting of cardboard, rotting planks, galvanised iron, rusty Coca Cola signs, all propped up with crooked pine poles, lengths of discarded timber; held together with bits of wire, pieces of rope, rusty nails; the roof held down by a collection of bricks and stones". The vivid details provided here are indicative of La Guma's power of observation. It is in fact this documentation of minute details which was carried over from journalism to fiction. For example, La Guma uses a similar descriptive prose in his depiction

of the life of the Pauls family in the pondokkies of the Cape Flats in his novel, *And a Threefold Cord*. Like in his other works, the incident referred to in this piece, in which a pondokkie is razed to the ground by fire, is incorporated in *And a Threefold Cord*, thereby providing further evidence of La Guma's determination "to wrest art from the material of life", to borrow a phrase from Shelly Fishkin (*From Fact to Fiction* 6). Indeed, as one reads this novel the impact of La Guma's conclusion in this piece ("The life of the pondokkie dweller is a "permanent period of reconstruction"") remains etched in one's memory.

The bulk of La Guma's column comprised vignettes of life of ordinary people in Cape Town, the cultural activities of coloured people and, usually presented in a humorous vein, anecdotes of the proceedings of the treason trial. The commentaries on local and international topical issues which dominated La Guma's column and most of the reports on political activities in Cape Town, which La Guma wrote between 1957 and 1960, provide another dimension of his journalism, showing the extent to which it had a lot to do not only with his political convictions but also with the nature of the particular media he served.

ADVOCACY JOURNALISM

Writing on censorship and the history of the South African counter-hegemonic press in 1987, Brian Bunting quotes Lenin as having stated in 1901: "A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organiser" ("South African Journalists in the Front Line" 15). This maxim may have been the guiding principle of all the journalists working for *New Age*. For example, in the same paper Bunting restates this view when he describes the responsibility of a journalist in the following terms:

Our cadres, engaged in various forms of organisation and action must remember that they are also propagandists, and that the purpose of all their work, in journalism as elsewhere, is to arouse, educate and mobilise the masses within South Africa to revolutionary activity. (15)

As part of the collective of reporters for *New Age* La Guma must have shared the same view of his role as a journalist. It does not come as a surprise, therefore, that La Guma was never an objective reporter - nor would he be in a situation that was an affront to his convictions.

La Guma was not just a chronicler of the world of the marginalised but he was also a propagandist. In keeping with the latter role most of the pieces he wrote in his "Up my Alley" column, as well as ordinary reports written for the newspaper after his appointment as a columnist, reveal evidence of his orientation towards "advocacy journalism". According to Hollowell advocacy journalism is the type of journalism in which journalists "openly advocate their political and moral beliefs in their work" (*Fact and Fiction* 154). Advocacy journalism is related to new journalism in so far as it renders visible the personal bias of the journalist. In the case of La Guma's journalism, this personal bias manifests itself in various ways.

In a special report on trade union activity in Cape Town which appeared in *New Age* dated December 19, 1957, La Guma wrote:

I have just completed a survey of recent trade union activities in Cape Town. The results are not pleasing. The failure of many trade union leaders, past and present, to give any sort of militant, clear-headed lead has resulted in unpreparedness and disorganisation which needs immediate remedy. ("Cape Town Trade Union Activity is at a Low Ebb"⁵)

He then refers to the formation of a Coloured Union Federation which, he suggests, "[smacks]

of anti-whitism”. Citing the fact that members of this trade union federation opted for white leadership, La Guma complains of “the low level of political consciousness of sections of the working class”. He attributes this to the failure of SACPO and the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) to organise the Coloured workers so that they can understand the significance of “real all-embracing unity against oppression”. The report ends on a prescriptive note: “SACPO has to get down to the job of fighting all the evils of racialism and self-seeking which has been the heritage of apartheid and capitalism in South Africa”.

La Guma had already distinguished himself as a dedicated socialist and one of the respected leaders of SACPO when he started working for *New Age* in 1955. Although these credentials may not have been the major reason for his recruitment to *New Age*, it could be argued that the staff of *New Age* hoped to use his influential position within the Coloured community to mobilise support for the Congress tradition of politics. In a report written for *New Age* of 10 April 1958 La Guma complains of a poor turnout in Coloured elections. This leads him to the following conclusion:

One thing emerged clearly: that the Coloureds had not been completely shaken out of their apathy, and that there was room for a lot more political work to raise their political consciousness to the highest level. (*Liberation Chabalala* 128)

Raising the political consciousness of the Coloured people indeed remained one of La Guma’s preoccupations while working for *New Age*. Nothing shows this preoccupation more clearly than the statement made by La Guma in his “Up My Alley” column of the 8th October 1960: “The time has come for our people to seriously assess their relationship with the struggle to liberate South Africa and the rest of the continent. Our place is with the active forces of progress so that we can

honestly claim that we deserve our place in the sun” (*Liberation Chabalala* 150). By “the active forces of progress” La Guma meant those organisations which embraced the Congress tradition rather than the “Trotskyite” Unity movement, which he consistently attacked in his articles, as, for example, when he refers to its boycott tactics and its workerist tendencies as looking at the South African situation through “rose-coloured glasses” (126).

One of the distinctive features of La Guma’s advocacy journalism was his class analysis of the South African political situation which stemmed from his Marxist-Leninist convictions. In a striking piece of personal reportage on the state of emergency, La Guma lambasts the brand of Afrikaner nationalism that the Nationalists represent which has resulted in South Africa becoming a “Police State”. He also rejects an analysis of the situation that is exclusively grounded on racial categories:

For we know that the State and its officials are there to protect the wealth and privileges, not just of Afrikaners, but of the entire class of property owners. We know also, that it is the English, and not the Afrikaners, who own by far the greater part of the wealth in the mines, factories, banks and big companies. (*Liberation Chablala* 147)

For La Guma, then, the South African struggle was more of a class struggle than a racial one.

It is therefore on this basis that La Guma rejected the idea that a change of heart would result in a meaningful political change in South Africa. In an earlier piece, which appeared in his “Up my Alley” column on the 9th of May 1957, La Guma makes a scathing attack on Mr George Golding

of the “Conservative Coloured Peoples National Union” who apparently endorses this view.

Writing in a humorous vein, he tell us:

But what Golding’s Moral Rearmament really tries to put across is that there is no necessity for the oppressed people to struggle for their rights; that the class struggle between capital and labour, the bosses and the workers, is unnecessary. Everybody should look into their hearts and decide to be good boys. Imagine Dr Verwoerd deciding that, really, there shouldn’t be pass laws. Imagine the big industrialists and farmers deciding that they were doing a bad thing by mercilessly exploiting the workers. Imagine the great imperialist powers breaking into tears and deciding to end colonial oppression. (134)

As can be inferred there is a tone of cynicism in La Guma's wry humour here.

The best example of advocacy journalism is found in La Guma's pieces on the Soviet Union and America which appeared in his “Up My Alley” column. Most of the vignettes of life in America provided in this column are meant to underscore the similarities between apartheid South Africa and the United States. Writing on Khrushchev’s visit to the US on 17 September 1959, La Guma comments:

With the Russian coat-of-arms on the moon and Mr K... in the USA the Yankees will undoubtedly do their best to impress both him and the rest of the world with the achievements of the American Way of Life. We wonder, however, how much different this ‘way of life’ is from the South African brand, for lately the papers have carried numerous reports of violence and crime rampant among the youth of America. The slums of New York have given birth to these murderous youngsters in the same way as the horrors of Johannesburg’s shanty towns have given rise to spoilers, Msomi’s and other tsotsi gangs. (174)

Like in his pieces on South Africa, La Guma's commentary here provides further evidence of his interest in the world of the lower depths of society. In most of his American pieces he is particularly concerned with the treatment meted out to the Negroes in places like Harlem and

Alabama who are marginalised by the American way of life. Drawing parallels between the situation in South Africa and America in a later piece of commentary, he tells us: “Like the Coloured people of [South Africa] the Negroes of the USA are a persecuted minority” (171). For La Guma, then, “apartheid discrimination...exists [too] in [this] country that boasts of being the leader of Western culture and civilisation”.

In contrast to the American pieces, there is ample evidence to suggest La Guma's glorification of the Soviet Union in his pieces on Russia. His pieces in this regard revolved around Sputnik and Russians' visit to the moon which for La Guma was an affirmation of the superiority of Russian technology to that of America. Writing in November 1957, he argued: “Big politicians in the States might try to make excuses for not being able to beat the Russians to the draw when it comes to launching satellites, but the little people will remain convinced that the Russians have got what it takes” (177). According to La Guma, Sputnik provided “the most effective sales-talk for socialism”. This was, of course, in line with not only *New Age*'s bias towards the Soviet Union, but also with La Guma's socialist convictions.

FABLES OF FACT

In his thought-provoking study, *Fables of Fact*, John Hellman provides a path-breaking conception of New Journalism. According to Hellman, the authors of these new journalistic works attempt to reconstruct “meaningful versions of the ‘news’ that continually threaten consciousness” through a combination of “the unique credibility of journalism with the self-reflexive pattern making of fabulist fiction” (ix). The result of this combination, Hellman concludes, is a form of journalism which “deals with fact through fable, discovering, constructing

and self-consciously exploring meaning beyond our media constructed ‘reality’, our ‘news’ ”. Hellman’s thesis outlined here would seem to provide a useful starting point for contextualising some ten or eleven short pieces written by La Guma in his column “Up My Alley” between August 1961 and January 1962.

Set in a typical contemporary *volkstaat* (as envisaged by conservative Afrikaners) called Pampoen-onder-die-Bos, these pieces, which are clearly reminiscent of Herman Charles Bosman’s situations and characters, as Roger Field and Andre Odendaal point out (*Liberation Chabalala* xiv), served as La Guma's commentaries on current developments in South Africa, especially on the moribund ideology of the ruling classes. Unlike in most of his early journalistic pieces, La Guma avoids direct comments on ruling class politics and resorts to allegory. Field and Odendaal have attributed the “allusory” nature of these pieces to intense repression in the country during this period in terms of which “open expression was increasingly becoming difficult”. However, one may also argue that La Guma, who had by then written a number of short stories and a novella, *A Walk in the Night*, was perhaps already finding it difficult to keep fiction out of his journalism. The Pampoen-onder-die-Bos pieces are clearly representative of what Hellman has defined as “profoundly transforming literary experiments embodying confrontation between...the worlds of journalism and fiction” (25). For in each piece La Guma draws on current issues of journalistic interest and “deals with fact through fable” by “creating an autonomous world” of Pampoen-onder-die-Bos that “indirectly probe(s) and illuminates the actual” extraordinary world of apartheid (Hellman 10). For this reason these pieces could be seen as belonging to the “hybrid known as literary journalism” (Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire* 8). The only difference is that these pieces are not avowedly autobiographical as is always the case with new journalism.

The bulk of the Pampoen-onder-die-Bos pieces deal with stereotypes. The earliest of these pieces which appeared in *New Age* on 31 August 1961 is presented in a “memo” written by Kommandant-in-Chief of Pampoen-onder-die-Bos, Gesper Wilderfontein, and directed to the Minister of Defence of this Volkstaat. In the report, the Kommandant takes issue with the destructive nature of a new weapon that “shoots three hundred rounds a minute” and recommends the Pampoen-onder-die-Bosers should rather stick to their “traditional voorlainers” to avoid disaster. To back up his assertions, the Kommandant cites the example of Old Koos van der Waterval whose use of the new weapon produced the following results:

Killed in action: Three fowls belonging to Oom Akkerboom; two ostriches belonging to Meneer Groenkloof; one cow and one donkey (owners unknown) and prize bull, property of Tante Grietjie. Additional casualties: Jannie Warbad, shot in agterplaas, and Gert Blesbok wounded in big toe. (*Liberation Chabalala* 213).

The real twist of this tale, and the Koommandant’s main concern, is that this new weapon does not serve its purpose - which is to “shoot hundreds and hundreds of kaffirs” and thereby to protect the law abiding citizens of Pampoen-onder-die-Bos and their property. Instead, it adversely affects the very people it is meant to protect, namely, the supporters of the ruling party of Pampoen-onder-die-Bos, the “Smashionalist Party”. The result is that some patriotic Pampoen-onder-die-Bosers have threatened to shift their allegiance from the Smashionalist Party to other parties such as the United party and “the Progs”, or Progressive Party. This example provides a clear indication of La Guma's effective use of the fable form to comment on the absurdity of the Afrikaners’ obsession with their military might during this period of intense repression. As readers we are expected to share in the author’s comic vision of the situation which is clearly meant to be a parody of Afrikaner militarism.

In fact, the whole text of Pampo-en-der-die-Bos is offered by La Guma as a counter-discourse of apartheid. As a strategy of subversion of apartheid discourse, the text of Pampo-en-der-die-Bos would seem to be in line with what Terdiman calls the technique of “re/citation” in terms of which counter-discourses seek to surround their antagonist and neutralise or explode it (*Discourse Counter-discourse* 68). In the case of La Guma's text, the aim is to take on the ruling class in its own language of racial ideology with the intention of reducing its terms of reference to absurdity: so there is also straightforward ridicule through the use of cultural stereotype.

This is best exemplified in a piece written by La Guma for *New Age* dated 5 October 1961 which was apparently written on the occasion of South Africa's expulsion from the International Soccer Federation. The piece begins with what seems to be a statement of fact that one would easily associate with conventional informative journalism: “This time it was not chaos, but pandemonium which came to Pampo-en-der-die-Bos when the news broke that the patriotic community had been expelled from the International Soccer Federation” (*Liberation Chabalala* 214). But La Guma looks beyond the confines of conventional journalism; instead, like the new journalists, he “seeks to use his imaginative powers and fictional craft to seek out and construct meaning” (Hellman 8). So, without necessarily breaking his journalistic contract with the reader, he nevertheless lets his imagination take its course. In a clear attempt to show the inverted logic of apartheid discourse, the narrative continues to tell us how the Pampo-en-der-die-Bosers attempt to rationalise their expulsion from the Federation, hailing it as “a great victory” because, in Meneer Wilderfontein's own words, the Federation “was dominated by a lot of kaffirs and coolies anyway”. The justification is taken to its logical conclusions in the last paragraph of this piece:

In any case soccer was a most un-Pampo-en-der-die-Bos game and would lead

to Communism, seeing that countries like Hungary and Poland also fielded teams. He was all for rugby, said Meneer Wilderfontein. It was our traditional sport, like apartheid and skietkommandoes. (*Liberation Chabalala* 214)

By trivialising the significant tenets of apartheid discourse, such as its racist and anti-Communist paranoia, in this way, the text renders visible the absurdity of the dominant discourse.

In another piece which appeared in *New Age* dated 21 December 1961, La Guma writes of the “stryddag and Covenant Day jukskei-cum-coffee-drinking competition” held at Oom van der Mielieblaar’s sheep kraal. What was remarkable in the celebrations, the voice of an omniscient narrator tells us, was the “consternation” caused by Gertjie Blesbok “who was out of step during the march of the past PODB Hoerskool Cadet Corps”. The rest, the narrative tells us:

However upon being taken to task about it, young Gertjie explained it was he who had been in step and that everybody else had been out of step. In fact, said young Gertjie, if he had been out of step, then he was only doing his patriotic duty by being in step while everybody else was out of step. Hadn’t the Prime Minister said that in order to preserve Pampoen-onder-die-Bos civilisation everybody being in step with everybody who was out of step was most un-Pampoen-onder-die-Bos, and deserved to be hanged, drawn, quartered and banned. After puzzling over this everybody agreed that they had never heard a more straightforward and illuminating exposition of Pampoen-onder-die-Bos policy. (221)

In this humorous vein, La Guma reconstructs the text of separate development embodied in apartheid discourse. He employs the power of parody to subvert apartheid discourse by drawing on the terms of reference that the dominant discourse itself offers in order to mock it. This can clearly be seen in the following piece which clearly represents La Guma's biting commentary on the South African Broadcasting Company as the mouthpiece of the National Party. This is how the piece begins:

If you have patience and keep on twiddling the knob of your wireless set you might, at some time or other, pick up Radio Pampoen-onder-die-Bos. The station is identified by its call sign, which can only be described as sounds made by an announcer trying to read the news through a gag. When he succeeds in getting the gag off he will say: 'This is radio Pampoen-onder-die-Bos. Here is the news read to you by Johannes Papegaaï and bought to you by the kind courtesy of the Prime Minister.' (*Liberation Chabalala* 218)

The narrative continues with biting irony:

Of course, none of the news from Radio Pampoen-onder-die-Bos is biased or slanted like that of other stations. Certainly not. All news is carefully sifted, drained, screened, boiled, distilled and purified before being presented to the public. So that the news you get is really new.

The resonance of the last statement epitomises the mocking tone of this narrative.

The best way of living with apartheid is to laugh at it. This seems to have been a recurrent sentiment conveyed by La Guma's Pampoen-onder-die-Bos pieces as exemplified in one which appeared in *New Age* of 12 October 1961. Written in the form of a short story, this piece relates the story of one Frikkie Mielieblaar of Pampoen-onder-die-Bos who is arrested by the Security Branch and "charged with heresy for advocating an equal number of black and white squares for draught-boards". The narrative continues:

That such a famous rugby player as Frikkie Mielieblaar could be guilty of such a heinous and heretical crime was beyond words. In fact the population was struck speechless. (214)

At a literal level this fable is gross exaggeration but it is, nevertheless, a fair representation of the extraordinary world of "Pampoen-onder-die-Bosism" (apartheid) at a figurative level. In this way, it would seem to be consistent with Terdiman's argument that "the satiric text attains its effect

by exaggerating traits of an individual argument or style in such a way that we experience deformation, but as one still consistent with characteristics recognizable in the original” (202).

Inevitably, the seriousness of apartheid prevented La Guma from writing consistently in a satirical vein; the result is that his longer fiction is presented in a more serious mode. It is perhaps also important to note here that these pieces were strictly of their time - Casey Motsitsi’s bug pieces written in a similar satirical view are also products of this period. The Pampoen-onder-die-Bos pieces, however, provide convincing evidence of La Guma's craftsmanship as a storyteller and, perhaps most significantly, mark his transition from journalism to fiction writing.

NOTES

1. See for example Michael Chapman's *The Drum Decade* and David Rabkin's doctoral thesis "Drum Magazine and the works of Black Writers Associated with it".
2. As Jeremy Cronin puts it: "...unlike the Drum writers, La Guma anchors himself in a consistent Congress-aligned politics... ("Tonight we've up my alley with us" 72). This review essay which appeared in *The African Communist* is unattributed but it emerged in the author's telephone conversation with Cronin that he is the author.
3. See, for example, "Non-European Audience Hears Emilyn Williams" (*New Age* January 24 1957) where La Guma recommends a revival of the "ancient art of storytelling... among African people so that the great epic of their long history can be made known to greater numbers of the people of South Africa". In a report entitled "This is not a fairy tale: Along Came a Spider" La Guma uses storytelling techniques that are related to the oral tradition of folktale to report on the stoppage of a school feeding scheme in Cape Town coloured schools.

CHAPTER FOUR

FROM FACT TO FICTION: *A WALK IN THE NIGHT*

“A gangster is not born, he is created by a reactionary social system”. --Alex La Guma

Briefly summarised, *A Walk in the Night* tells the story of Michael Adonis, a Coloured worker who has been dismissed from work at a sheet-metal factory by a racist foreman. He attempts to drown his sorrows on cheap wine but his anger for this apparently unfair dismissal from work does not subside. On his way to his tenement from a public bar he meets Doughty, a decrepit white man with whom he shares a drink. In his drunkenness, Michael Adonis, who fails to suppress his anger at the white foreman, vents his anger on Doughty, whom he kills inadvertently. Doughty is found dead in his tenement by Willieboy, an acquaintance of Michael Adonis who, knowing that if he is seen at the scene of the crime he will be held accountable, decides to leave the tenement surreptitiously. He is spotted by leaving the tenement by John Abrahams who later informs the police that he saw Willieboy leaving the old man's place under suspicious circumstances. Using the clues from Abrahams, Constable Raalt identifies Willieboy and tracks him down in a hunting expedition that culminates in the death of Willieboy in the back of a police van. Meanwhile Michael Adonis, who succeeds in escaping as soon as he realises that the body has been discovered, is eventually compelled to join a gang when it becomes clear to him that its members could use the scanty clue they have on his part in the murder to sell him out to the police.

In an interview with Cecil Abrahams, La Guma explained that his writing of this novella was

prompted by his reading of “a short paragraph in a Cape Town newspaper” which reported that “a so called hooligan had died in a police van after having been shot in District Six”. In response La Guma decided to create a fictitious account of “what may have happened” in relation “to what [he] thought life in District Six really was like” (*Alex La Guma* 48). La Guma's intention in writing this novella, then, was to provide a broader and probably more authentic account of the lumpenproletariat in District Six. It should be remembered that La Guma had prior to the writing of this novel written journalistic reports on the subject of crime. So as a person who knew District Six intimately and, having tested the views of some of the people who were the possible subjects of the newspaper report, La Guma felt well qualified to provide an informed albeit fictional account of the incident.

Writing a commentary on the rate of crime in Johannesburg for “Up My Alley” in *New Age* on 23 May 1957, La Guma observed: “Of late the headlines in Johannesburg dailies have been reading like those of Chicago in the heydays of Al Capone, John Dillinger and the hectic days of illegal booze”. After listing a number of recent criminal offences in different places in almost catalogue form La Guma concludes his report:

A society based on suppression, violence, armed force, poverty and unemployment creates violence, bloodshed, gangsterism and murder. Bad schools produce bad pupils. America's worst gangsters were bred in the slum-ridden districts of the East Sides, Harlems and little Italies of every city. Crime and vice breeds where there is poverty and filth, where proper home-life and education are non-existent and unemployment is rife. Add to all these conditions the frustration and misery caused by pass laws, permit systems, the colour bar that denies the Non-European people advancement and a proper place in society, and you will see the breeding grounds of South Africa's underworld. *A gangster is not born, he is created by a reactionary system* (My italics). (*Liberation Chabalala* 52)

These words may well be regarded as the informing paradigm of *A Walk in the Night*. For it is

precisely this issue of how the socio-economic conditions determine the fate of the people of District Six that La Guma attempts to address in this novel. The last statement in the passage quoted above is crucial in so far as it can be seen as providing a clue to the ideological function of the text intended by the author and could be interpreted as suggestive of the fact that the novel is informed by Marxist economic determinism. In a word, this statement is suggestive in terms of the portrayal of Michael Adonis in the novel. The objective ideological function of the text, however, enables a plurality of readings most of which have linked the text with environmental determinism and have, on this basis, described it as a naturalist text.

Two major reasons have been cited to justify this claim: one is La Guma's preoccupation with a documentation of minute details and the other is the argument that La Guma's characters in this novel are helpless victims who have no control on their fate - for this reason some have even concluded that the novel is pessimistic. It was in fact some of the earliest reviews and critical essays which tilted the argument in this direction. "*A Walk in the Night* is a short naturalistic novel of murder in the underworld...", observed one of the earliest reviewers (Astrachan 59). This was immediately followed by Bernth Lindfors's critical essay, "Form and Technique in the Novels of Richard Rive and Alex La Guma", in which he cites both La Guma's "descriptive style" and the argument that La Guma's characters "are victims of their environment and passions" in order to back up his claim that "La Guma's writing is naturalistic" (44). In a subsequent essay, "Robin Hood Realism in South African English Fiction", this argument is reiterated albeit with some qualification:

La Guma's realism is quite a bit like the naturalism of American novelists such as

Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and James Farrel. The hero is seen as an individual at the mercy of his environment and passions.... However, La Guma differs from the American naturalists in his belief that man should struggle against his bonds, should seek to change his environment rather than adapt himself to it. (18)

The association of the novel with naturalism is again reinforced by Lewis Nkosi's speculation that La Guma's "style owes much to Zola and the masculine rigour of Hemingway" ("Alex La Guma : The man and His Work" 112). Although similar arguments have survived in one way or another,¹ it was J.M. Coetzee in his two essays, "Alex La Guma and the Responsibilities of a South African Writer" and "Man's Fate in the Novels of Alex La Guma", who, while noting what he calls "the naturalist bias of the novel" ("The Responsibilities" 7) as well as La Guma's naturalist style, which he also attributes to the influence of American writers such as Farrel, Richard Wright and Upton Sinclair ("Man's Fate" 345), convincingly argued that La Guma "is not a naturalist but a critical realist" ("The Responsibilities" 10).² This prompted a reconsideration of the problematic assertion that *A Walk in the Night* is a naturalist text. The result was the appearance of a more cautious essay by JanMohamed, who, although also drawing some parallels between La Guma and the American naturalists, nevertheless observes that the novel is "quasi-naturalistic" and "ironically deceptive" (*Manichean Aesthetics* 229). Taking her cue from JanMohamed, Kathleen Balutansky contends that *A Walk in The Night* is "an ironically deceptive novel: its style appears realistic and naturalistic while it is essentially symbolic; its literal characters are ill-fated while its figurative character is a unified collectivity with a promising future; and finally, its plot appears static while its theme is turbulently active" (*The Novels of Alex La Guma* 29).

Lindfors also endorses this view in his latest essay, arguing that La Guma's symbolism which is

“at odds with his naturalism gives this pessimistic story an optimistic end” (“Alex La Guma's Complementary and Contradictory Strategies of Protest” 48). S.O. Asein does not directly intervene in this debate although he devotes his chapter on *A Walk in the Night* to an examination of La Guma's “technique of fictional naturalism” (*Alex La Guma : The Man and His Work* 44). His interest, however, lies in exploring how La Guma's use of documentation of minute details serves to enhance his artistic purposes.

Although these debates offer useful insights into La Guma's literary realism in this novel there are, nevertheless, some oversights in these interpretations. No one can deny that La Guma's style in this novel is naturalist in so far as it shows his heavy reliance on the chronicling of detail, but to attribute it solely to the influence of Zola and the American naturalists is somewhat misleading. La Guma had as much access to Gorky's early short stories such as “Checklash” and “Twenty-seven Men and a Woman”, which are also quite remarkable for their descriptive style and attention to detail, as he had to American writers.³ Another factor which is largely overlooked in this discussion is the extent to which La Guma's journalistic background has an impact on his writing of this novel not only in terms of his subjects but also in terms of his style.⁴ *A Walk in the Night* is a clear demonstration of La Guma's attempt to transform his journalism into fiction both in terms of subject and style. Consider, for example, the short passage from “The Dead-End Kids of Hanover Street” quoted in the previous chapter in which La Guma provides in catalogue form the details of the daily activities of people in Hanover Street. Hanover Street is described as a centre where different types of people meet and these include the rich and the poor, “hawkers bawling their wares” and unemployed youth whiling away time around the shops or “leaping” on and off the speeding trackless-trams with the agility of monkeys....” (*Liberation Chabalala* 9). This attention to detail which attests to La Guma's power of observation, the use of the catalogue

form and the remarkable descriptive prose are all carried over, marking a continuity in La Guma's style:

Around the bus stop a crowd pushed and jostled to clamber onto the trackless trams, struggling against the passengers fighting to alight. Along the pavements little knots of youths lounged in twos and threes or more, watching the crowds streaming by, jeering, smoking, joking, joking against the noise, under the balconies, in doorways, around the plate-glass windows. A half-mile of sound and movement and signs, signs, sign: Coco-Cola, Sale Now On, Jewellers, The Modern Outfitters, If You Don't Eat Here We'll Both Starve.... (*A Walk in the Night* 8)

As can be seen La Guma here is describing the same locale, and the prose style, which is marked by an accumulation of detail, is strikingly similar. Yet this carry-over hardly receives any comments from critics dealing with La Guma's realism.⁵

“In any protest against the particular social conditions these conditions themselves must have the central place”, argues Lukacs (*Realism in Our Time* 29). La Guma might not have read Lukacs but a similar consideration could have served as the guiding principle in La Guma's composition of his work whose remarkable descriptive prose is largely devoted to the depiction of the dehumanising socio-economic conditions of District Six. Here is one of the most obvious examples in which La Guma's intention is quite explicit:

And in the dampness deadly life formed in decay and bacteria and mould, and in the heat and airlessness the rot appeared, too, so that things which once were whole or new withered or putrefied and the smells of their decay and putrefaction pervaded the tenements of the poor. In the dark corners and the unseen crannies, in the fetid heat and slippery dampness the insects and vermin, maggots and slugs, ‘roaches in shiny black armour, spiders like tiny grey youngsters carrying death under their minute feet or in the suckers, or rats with dusty black eyes with disease under the claws or in the fur, moved mysteriously. (34-35)

This passage is quoted here because it captures vividly images of stench, filth and decay that are

recurrent in La Guma's rendering of the environment of District Six in this work. As Gareth Cornwell correctly observes in reference to similar passages in the novel: "...not the slightest trace of squalor or decay, no crack, stain or smell is allowed to pass unremarked" ("Protest in Fiction: An Approach to Alex La Guma" 109). La Guma's point in placing such a heavy emphasis on these conditions is precisely that this atmosphere of decay is so pervasive it can hardly be ignored. Understandably, this documentation of minute details (especially when seen in isolation from its context) may prompt critics to conclude that La Guma overplays his hand, that he strains for effect and is less economic in his descriptive method. The point at issue, however, is whether these descriptions are organically linked to his purposes in terms of plot and theme.

In his study, *The Decline of Modernism*, Peter Burger provides a useful summary of what Lukacs in his essay, "Narration or Description?", identifies as the different creative methods of realism and naturalism. According to Burger it is not description as such that Lukacs rejects in naturalism but it is the functional value of the description that becomes crucial in Lukacs's distinction between realism and naturalism. In naturalism, description becomes an element in its own right and the environment becomes more pronounced than the characters; the representation of characters becomes subordinate to the representation of a social life world. In a realist text, by contrast, description of milieu is functionally related to individuals, being used either as a means of characterizing individuals in the text or to provide a sense of the world with which a character must engage if he is to realize himself (103-104). It does not suffice therefore to note that La Guma's style is naturalist without taking cognisance of the functionality of his descriptive prose in the text.

Using this analogy one may argue that descriptive detail in La Guma's novella is not in any way

self-justifying nor is it merely meant to provide “background” or “setting” (Lunn 80); instead the description of milieu is organically linked to characterization. This is best exemplified in the characterization of Doughty. The narrator describes him as a “decrepit” alcoholic who “is waiting for death, trapped at the top floor of the old tenement, after the sweep of human affairs has passed over him and left him broken, and helpless, as a wreckage disintegrating on a hostile beach” (25). His room is described as “hot and airless as a newly-opened tomb”. The link between the imagery of death and decay of the environment and the characterization of Doughty is obvious here - the implication is that Doughty has almost become a replica of the dehumanising environment of which he is a product. Abrahams tells us that Doughty has been living in the tenement for “a long time” (62). Similarly, Joe’s characterization has an affinity to the imagery of stench that pervades the atmosphere of the tenements - we are told that “he smelled of a mixture of sweat, slept-in clothes and seaweed” (9). Unlike Doughty, however, the point is made that Joe’s condition is attributable to poverty and not to his acceptance of the state of moral degradation. There are other characters who are linked - however indirectly - to the environment in their characterization. Although Asein’s analysis of La Guma's realism is not informed by Lukacs’s theory of realism it captures succinctly the functionality of descriptive detail in *A Walk in the Night* which links the novella with realism in the Lukacsian model offered by Burger above. Asein rightly observes:

[La Guma] deliberately evokes sordid qualities of the environment and blends details of suburban squalor with the ruggedness and somewhat decadent values which he identifies with the characters that inhabit the locations. Thus, in varying degrees, all the characters embody one or another of the symptoms of pervasive decay or stupor.... Suggestive images of decay, sterility and the almost irretrievable decline of the entire suburban culture of the location clinch the correlation between character and environment. (*The Man and His Work* 49)

La Guma's descriptive detail, then, it may be argued, is based on what Lukacs would call

“perspective’s principle of selection”, in terms of which relevance to the development of plot and the action of characters becomes paramount in the choice of details used in the novel (*Realism In our Time* 33,54). It is through this selective choice of details that La Guma rescues his work from the “problem of narrative detail” (75) that Lukacs associates with the naturalism of Zola.⁶

One of the most remarkable aspects of the realism of this novella is the fact that despite the apparent predominance of description of milieu in this work, our attention as readers is consistently drawn to the action of the characters. This in itself provides further evidence of La Guma's skilful use of narrative detail and confirms the presence of “a hierarchy of significance” (34) in his presentation of situations and characters - a fact which Lukacs has identified as crucial in the distinction between realism and naturalism.

The argument that La Guma’s characters in *A Walk in the Night* are victims of circumstances over which they have no control is the major argument that is used to put this novel into the fold of naturalism. The most cited examples in this regard are the innocent deaths of Doughty and Willieboy; both deaths have racial overtones. This claim is certainly not unfounded, for, on occasion, the narrative itself seems to underscore the helplessness of the people of District Six and provide a somewhat bleak picture of the situation. For example, drawing on Hamlet, Doughty makes an analogy that people like him and Michael Adonis are “[just] ghosts, doomed to walk the night” (28). In the same vein, we are told of people who stand or sit in the doorways of Hanover street “like wasted ghosts in a plague-ridden city” (21). The problem, however, is that such an argument relies heavily on the assumption that this apparent “pessimism” (JanMahomed 238) is a manifestation of the “naturalistic-deterministic influence” on the novel (“Man’s Fate” 345). It is doubtful, however, whether this “determinism” can primarily be attributed to what is perceived

as La Guma's "naturalism". For one thing, La Guma's interpretation of the situation of District Six is clearly informed by Marxist material determinism and not by naturalistic determinism. For this reason, La Guma deliberately invites a materialist reading of the situation as early as the third chapter in the conversation between Michael Adonis, Greene and the taxi-driver. The conversation is triggered off by Adonis, who in his disillusion with his dismissal from work suggests that if he could get a job at the docks he would perhaps go to America - a country which, in his opinion, does not practice racism. (It is perhaps important to note here that Adonis links his dismissal from work to racism - hence his responses whether verbally or physically articulated become racially motivated). The discussion then takes a different turn when a comparative perspective on the question of race between these two countries is adopted. This is how the discussion reads in part:

'I don't give a damn for a bastard white arse,' Michael Adonis said and stared morosely into his glass. 'That's politics,' Greene said. 'Cut out politics!' He was a little drunk. 'It's the capitalis' system,' the taxi-driver said. 'Heard it at a meeting in the Parade. Whites act like that because of the capitalis' system'. 'What the hell you mean - capitalis' system?' Michael Adonis asked. 'What's this capitalis' system you talking about?' 'I can't explain it right, you know, hey,' the taxi-driver answered, frowning. 'But I heard some johns on the Parade talking about it. Said colour bar was because of the system'. 'Shit.' 'Cut out politics', Greene said again. 'Those bastards all come from Russia'. He hiccupped again, spraying saliva from his mouth. 'What's wrong with Russia?', the taxi-driver asked. 'What you know about Russia?' (19)

It seems to me that critics have either misread or underestimated the significance of this passage, yet it has far-reaching implications. Firstly, the taxi-driver identifies the capitalist system as the root cause of the problem of the suffering of the people of District Six and the Blacks in general. Secondly, there is a clear distinction being made here between the taxi-driver who shows a particular level of political consciousness, however elementary, Michael Adonis who lacks political consciousness and Greene whose attitude to politics is a manifestation of the working of

government propaganda - his response ('Those bastards all come from Russia') is telling in this regard. The implication here is that the taxi-driver at least has this elementary grasp of the situation because he attends Communist Party meetings at the Grand Parade.⁷ As can be seen, then, this is the political reading of the novel that this passage is meant to offer.

In terms of this reading La Guma's characters have to be seen as victims of the contradictions of racial capitalism. Michael Adonis is, for example, unfairly dismissed from work but he does not challenge the decision of the foreman, so he is thrown into the quagmire of "poverty, petty crime and violence" (4).⁸ The narrative, however, shows that having a job in itself does not guarantee one's freedom from poverty - Franky, who is working as a stevedore, is inundated with "unpaid bills and sour babies" (35) he can hardly maintain. Joe, "the scavenger", as Coetzee calls him ("The Responsibilities" 9), is literally a walking embodiment of poverty who exists on the extreme fringes of the capitalist world. The problem, however, is that most of the characters lack this political understanding. "If any class or individual cannot comprehend his existence, this existence appears to him as some abstract, universal fate" George Bizstray quotes Lukacs as having suggested (*Marxist Models of Literary Realism* 147). This is precisely how the unpoliticised characters of La Guma's novel interpret the situation. However, La Guma does not reinforce this interpretation - as the passage referred to earlier shows. Coetzee puts this more tersely when he points out that "the most comprehensive political statement that La Guma makes in the novel" is to offer "a critique of the Coloured proletariat" for its lack of political consciousness ("The Responsibilities" 10).⁹ To read the text as naturalist is therefore tantamount to giving ideological assent to the very interpretation that La Guma criticizes in his characters.

While La Guma makes an indictment against Coloureds for their lack of political consciousness

and acknowledges that the contradictions of racial capitalism can lead to moral degeneration and criminality, as in the case of Adonis, he nevertheless demonstrates that there are characters whose moral integrity provides a glimmer of hope. One of those characters is Joe who attempts to dissuade Adonis from joining the gangsters. As Coetzee points out: “The moral force of his plea... seems to argue that conscience need not die under the weight of social forces” (“The Responsibilities” 9). Sadly, Joe is too late - the narrative shows that even before the gang convinces Michael to join it, he has already lost his conscience, “feeling pleased and proud” (66) that he has killed a man. It is, however, in the Lorenzo family that the optimism of the narrative resides. Not only do both Franky and his wife retain their moral integrity against all odds but they also demonstrate the need for a communal sense of solidarity amongst the oppressed when they reject collaboration with the police. Franky even goes further by defying police authority when he discourages Abrahams from volunteering to provide information about Doughty’s killer to the police. It is thus no coincidence that it is the imminent birth of the Lorenzo’s next child that ends the novel on a high note and embodies the symbolism of a brighter future (96). It is through this symbolism and characterization (as the earlier Coetzee and later Lindfors demonstrate) that the novel rejects naturalism and embraces critical realism.

Franky is in fact more than just a “potential hero” (“The Responsibilities” 10) of the novel; he is also a character in whom La Guma's employment of the notion of “typicality” resides. This can be seen most clearly in the fact that, although he lacks political consciousness like other characters in the novel, he is, nevertheless, aware of the contradictions within society and his response to the situation is not only individual but also representative. Nowhere in the novel is this awareness of social contradictions within society more articulated than in Franky’s words: “The rich people got money but they got one, two kids. They got enough to feed ten, twenty children and they

only make one or two. We haven't even enough for one kid and we make eight, nine - one a year. Jesus" (36). La Guma's achievement in this novella is that he has been able to take what Lukacs in his work on Solzhenitsyn would call "an extreme situation" (*Solzhenitsyn* 8) and show how it is representative of this society during this particular period of historical development. In the light of the argument provided above, then, it should be clear that while La Guma's style is naturalist he avoids the "arbitrary naturalism" associated with Zola through his selection of "the essentials" (Ramomoorthy 10) and adopts critical realism which is embodied both in his characterization and his symbolism.

NOTES

1. See, for example, S.M. Tumedí's "Naturalism in Two African Novels".
2. Coetzee's allusion to Richard Wright is interesting because since then a number of critics have drawn parallels between La Guma's Michael Adonis and Wright's Bigger in *Native Son*. See, for example, Chandramohan (33-35) and Asein's *Alex La Guma* (62). It is also curious that La Guma alludes to the American situation not only in his snippet on crime in Johannesburg - he specifically mentions Chicago, which gives the setting to Wright's novel - but also in the novel itself. This raises some interesting questions on intertextuality which fall outside the purview of this study.
3. It is perhaps significant to note that in a recent critical essay, Kenneth Parker takes issue with Coetzee precisely on the ground that in emphasizing intertextual connections with American naturalists he ignores La Guma's access to the Russian writers ("J.M. Coetzee: The Postmodern and the Postcolonial" 95).
4. It is perhaps worth mentioning here that in fact most of the American naturalists whose works La Guma read also gained their apprenticeships in journalism. These include, amongst others, Dreiser, Hemingway, Steinbeck and Jack London. For further information on this see Shelley Fishkin's *From Fact to Fiction*.
5. Only Abrahams in *Alex La Guma* and Chandramohan seem to be attentive to the significance of this aspect. While Abrahams's comments are confined to the impact of

journalism on this novel in terms of subject (See “Reporter at Work”), Chandramohan makes useful comments on La Guma's style: “Many [South African] writers, including La Guma, were influenced by the link with journalism as regards their choice of genre, the content of their writings, and more importantly, the literary style. Links with journalism led to the predominance of the documentary style of narration” (78).

6. Nkosi acknowledges this role of perspective in La Guma's work when he argues that “it is his ruthless selection of what counts which makes [La Guma] a superb artist” (“The Man and his Work” 112). Nkosi’s high regard for La Guma's realism is reinforced in a fairly recent essay, “South African Literature : Resistance and the Crisis of Representation”, in which he argues that La Guma “succeeded in performing what most literary theorists of realism say can no longer be done” (50).
7. La Guma recalls how he used to encourage fellow workers to attend meetings on the Grand Parade “where the Communist Party held lunchtime talks” (See Arnold Adams 60).
8. I do not agree with Coetzee’s argument that Adonis does not belong to a trade union because blacks were not allowed to do so. La Guma himself was a member of a trade union before 1950 (Arnold Adams 60).
9. La Guma started writing this novel at a time when there was a general concern about the lack of political consciousness amongst the Coloured working class and youth generally. For more information on this see La Guma's *New Age* report, “Cape Town Trade Union Activity is at a Low Ebb” and Henry Naude’s survey report on Coloured youth, “A

Straight Talk to Coloured Teenagers”.

CHAPTER FIVE

“ROAD TO CONSCIOUSNESS” : *AND A THREEFOLD CORD AND THE STONE COUNTRY*

As in *A Walk in the Night*, the subject and style of *And A Threefold Cord* have their roots in La Guma's early journalism. As indicated in chapter two, a documentary vignette, which appeared in La Guma's "Up My Alley" of *New Age* on 27 June 1957, in which he focuses on how adverse winter weather conditions affect slum dwellers, is the likely source of La Guma's subjects in this novel. For La Guma's concern with the plight of the poor slum dwellers of the Cape Flats is also at the core of the plot of *And A Threefold Cord*. As the novel begins the Pauls family, which lives in a dilapidated pondokkie in Windermere, is not only threatened by the incessant rain which highlights the need for attention to a leaking roof, but also concerned about the deteriorating health of Dad Pauls. Charlie, Dad Pauls's eldest son, who consistently demonstrates his concern about his father's fragile health, attempts to repair the leaking roof. The ultimate death of Dad Pauls, however, seems to spell disaster for his family - translating into a reality the idiom "it never rains but it pours". Firstly, Ronald, Charlie's younger brother, is arrested for stabbing his girlfriend, Susie Meyer, who, as a result of her liberal sexual orientation, he is convinced has betrayed him by having a sexual encounter with the lonely garage owner, George Mostert. Secondly, a pondokkie which belongs to Freda, Charlie's girlfriend, is razed to the ground and her children are incinerated as a result of a faulty primus stove which is left burning in the shack to keep the children warm. Nevertheless, the novel ends on a positive note when Charlie accepts responsibility for Freda's welfare and invites her to join the Pauls family.

La Guma's writing of *And A Threefold Cord* was prompted by a request from Seven Seas Publishers in Berlin, East Germany, who approached him while he was detained in Roeland Street jail in Cape Town, inviting him to write a novel for publication (Abrahams, *Alex La Guma* 69). Hitherto, La Guma had written a short story, "The Wedding", which, although its plot revolves around the Pauls family, is not overtly political, its central thrust being the arrangements being made for the marriage of the daughter of the Pauls.¹ However, the knowledge that the novel, *And A Threefold Cord*, was to be published in East Germany must have had an impact not only on La Guma's conception or composition of this work but also on its intended ideological effect on a wider international audience. It is perhaps for this reason that the novel is more overtly political. Chandramohan correctly identifies two "concessions" made by La Guma in the novel to accommodate the expectations of an "overseas readership": firstly, Brian Bunting's foreword which not only introduces La Guma, the political activist and creative writer, to a wider audience, but also attempts to provide what is called in Marxist terms "the conditions of the novel's production". Secondly, the novel provides a glossary of Afrikaans words which is clearly meant for a non-South African readership (Chandramohan 94).

On one level, La Guma provides a somewhat "innocent" reason as a motivation for his writing of the novel:

... it was a matter of recording history or recording situation. The book is about suburban slums which is a character of the South African scene.... This is just another scene in the life of the community, another facet of the picture. I decided again that the picture of the suburban slums did not appear anywhere in South African writing, so I said well why shouldn't I do it, because it is part of our life, our scene, so it should appear in the picture. (Abrahams, *Alex La Guma* 70)

In these words, La Guma alludes to his novels as providing individual “pictures” of South African “totality” - a comment obviously strengthened by the fact that the interview took place when most of his novels had already been published - and once again reaffirms his role as a social historian.

La Guma's use of subjects drawn from his journalism is but one indication that it might well have been his intention to “record history”. It would seem, however, that on another level, an arguably more immediate motivation for the writing of this novel is the one spelt out by La Guma in his response to Abrahams's question about the weather as a dominant feature of the novel. He points out:

Well, part of the fact is that the weather plays a part in creating the atmosphere and it helps to describe the scenes and so on. There is also the fact that overseas people believe the South African regime's tourist propaganda that it is a country with a perfect weather. I had an idea that rather we could use the weather as a feature of South Africa, but also in terms of its symbolic potential, and thus at the same time to make it genuinely South African. In other words I am contesting official propaganda of South Africa's natural beauty and trying to show the world that the tourist poster world of wonderful beaches and beautiful golf links is not the total picture. (*Alex La Guma* 71-72)

Authorial intention, then, reveals La Guma's recognition of the political ideological effect that his work might have on a wider international audience as having served as an impetus for his writing of the novel.

In line with La Guma's avowed intention referred to above *And A Threefold Cord* begins with exhaustive descriptions of weather:

In the north-west the rainheads piled up, first in cottony tufts blown away by the high wind, then in skeins of dull cloud, and finally in high climbing battlements:

like a rough wall of mortar built across the horizon, so that the sun had no gleam, but a pale of phosphorescence behind the veil of grey. The sea was grey too, and metallic, moving in sluggish swells, like a blanket blown in a tired wind. The autumn had come early that year, and then the winter, and now the sky was heavy with the promise of rain. (1)

This detailed description of the weather conditions does not just serve the purpose of “creating atmosphere” as La Guma modestly suggests, but it is significant to the world of the novel in so far as the weather directly affects the lives of the characters:

The people of the shanties and the *pondokkie* cabins along the national road and beside the railway tracks and in the suburban sand-lots watched the sky and looked towards the north-west where the clouds pregnant with moisture, hung beyond the mountain. When the burst of rain came, knocking on the roofs, working men carried home loads of pilfered corrugation cardboard cartons, salvaged rusted sheets of iron and tin to reinforce the roofs. Heavy stones were heaved onto the lean-tos and patched roofs, to keep them down when the wind rose. (2)

This juxtaposition could create the impression that the novel’s focus is the struggle of humanity against natural forces (rain) - a preoccupation that would easily encourage a naturalist interpretation of the novel.² Nevertheless, La Guma's interest lies in a realistic rendering of how adverse weather conditions accentuate the “abject poverty” (81) of the residents of the shanties, as particularly represented in the Pauls family. The poverty of the Pauls family is clearly demonstrated in the description of the effort that was put into the building of the “house” itself.

As the narrator tells us:

Dad Pauls and Charlie had scavenged, begged and, on dark nights, stolen material for the house. They had dragged for miles sheets of rusty corrugated iron, planks, pieces of cardboard, and all the astonishing miscellany that had gone into the building of the house. (17)

Eventually, the narrator goes on, “the whole place had a precarious, delicately-balanced appearance of a house of cards” (18). This makeshift structure is but one of “the collection of dilapidated shanties that was springing up like sores on the leg of land off the highway” (17).

The housing problem, is, however, only emblematic of a broader problem of the lack of a proper infrastructure in this settlement. In the descriptive prose that is the cornerstone of La Guma's “naturalist” style in his early novels the narrator makes this point quite explicitly:

It could hardly be called a street, not even a lane; just a hollowed track that stumbled and sprawled between and around and through the patchwork of shacks, cabins, huts and wickiups : a maze of cracks between the jigsaw pieces of settlement, a writhing battlefield of mud and strangling entanglements of wet and rusty barbed wire, sagging sheets of tin, toppling pickets, twigs and peeled branches and collapsing odds and ends with edges and points as dangerous as sharks’ teeth, which made up the framework around the quagmire of lots. (21)

As in District Six in his *A Walk in the Night*, there are signs of decay in the shanties. This is also described in a catalogue form that had by now become typical of La Guma's documentary style: “Over everything hung the massed smell of pulpy mould, rotten sacking, rain, cookery, chickens and the rickety latrines that leaned crazily in the pools of horrid liquid, like drunken men in their own regurgitation” (21).

As Chandramohan correctly observes: “In his descriptions of the locale and the people La Guma shows a concern for naturalistic detail, as he had done earlier in *A Walk in the Night*” (97). To suggest that such “descriptive passages are clearly more important than the narrative” (JanMohamed 239), however, seems to tilt the argument towards a naturalistic interpretation of the novel. The reality is that in spite of such descriptions the significance of the narrative is not

undermined because these descriptions are organically linked to the plot. Larisa Saratovskya puts it more succinctly: “The attention to the dank and at times loathsome details are justified since they are not a goal unto themselves, but a means towards a realistic portrayal of [social] reality, of the ‘bottom depths’ seen a la Gorky” (“Alex La Guma” 162).³

THE MYTH OF THE FRONTIER AND ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES OF SURVIVAL

La Guma dismisses any naturalistic reading of the novel by being quite emphatic about the fact that the pondokkie dwellers survive against all odds. He makes this point quite explicitly in his comparison of the solitary life of the garage owner, George Mostert, with that of the pondokkie dwellers. From his garage Mostert observes “the jumble pattern of shacks and shanties sprawled like an unplanned design worked with dull rags on a dirty piece of crumbled sackcloth” and he thinks, “a strange country, a foreign people”. Nevertheless, the narrative continues:

Life was there, no matter how shabby, a few yards from George Mostert’s Service Station and Garage, but he was trapped in his glass office by his own loneliness and a wretched pride in a false racial superiority, the cracked embattlements of his world, and he peered out sadly past the petrol pumps which gazed like petrified sentries across the concrete no-man’s-land of the road. (38)

Mostert’s garage stands like “a lone blockhouse on a frontier” and, although he has money - for which pondokkie dwellers such as Susie Meyer (83) and Ronald (93) envy him - his “loneliness [hangs] about him in the form of a spirit of enforced friendliness, a desire for conversation, a willingness to do a small favour” (36). La Guma's rendering of this contrast is curious in so far as it seems to draw on and evoke the myth of the frontier in the depiction of the relationship between blacks and whites in 17th and 18th century South African historiography. The

terminology is telling since it bears the stamp of what Dorian Haarhof in his study *The Wild South-West* calls “the use of a language construct that constitutes [a] ‘Frontierese’” (5) - words such as “frontier” and phrases such as “lone guard action” immediately come to mind. Although Mostert’s loneliness tempts him to “open” the frontier by socially interacting with the shanty dwellers, as seen, for example, in his “desire for a conversation, a willingness to do a favour”, the frontier remains “closed” because of his “wretched pride in a sense of false superiority”.⁴ Later Mostert wonders whether he should “take the plunge and accept Charlie’s invitation” to visit the settlement but “hesitation had attacked him again” (8) and he took refuge in his fate which is summed up in one word “solitude” (37).

In contrast to Mostert’s “solitude”, the life of the slum dwellers is pervaded by a communal sense of solidarity. For example, when Charlie and his Dad build their shack they get the help of other “Coloured and African shack dwellers” (18). During the period of preparation for Dad Pauls’s the prevalence of a sense of “communal self-consciousness” (Carpenter, “Ovals, spheres, ellipses...” 87) is clearly manifest in Missus Nzuba’s generosity and willingness to help. When Ma Pauls shows her appreciation for Nzuba’s offer of water to the family Nzuba responds: “There is no need to be thankful. We all got to stand by each other” (90). There is also a manifestation of solidarity during the funeral proceedings as people converge at the Paulses: “Relations and neighbours were assembled there, swarthy mulatto faces and very dark African, all looking solemn, for there is unity even in death” (73). In the next chapter La Guma again reiterates the vibrancy of life in the pondokkies despite all odds: “But there is time for laughter and for merriment” (78), reads the first sentence of this chapter.

Such juxtaposition of Mostert’s life of “solitude” with the vibrancy of the shack dwellers could

easily be misconstrued, leading to the conclusion that La Guma invokes an Afrocentric-informed notion of African communalism that is pitted against white individualism. This impression could be intensified when one considers the “message” of solidarity that dominates the political logic of the novel as articulated in the epigraph which is taken from the Bible in Ecclesiastes iv : 9-12.

Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour
For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow;
but woe to him that is alone when he falleth;
for he hath not another to help him up.
Again, if two lie together, then they have heat, but how can one be warm alone?
And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord
is not quickly broken.

However, La Guma eschews this notion of monolithic African communalism in his allusion to the class distinctions that exist amongst Africans themselves. In a dramatic re-enactment of how people of the shanties have to beg for water from those who have access to water, the narrative tells us: “Those who owned the plumbing and taps sold water to those who lacked such amenities” (71). The conceptualization of differences in racial terms is thus subverted by a paradigm of class analysis. Against this background, then, Mostert’s alienation should not only be seen in terms of race but also in terms of his class position - it is important in this regard to note that Ronald is of the opinion that Mostert gains Susie Meyer’s sexual favour because “the burg’s *mos* got a car and a business and cash” and not just because he is white.

CRITICAL OR SOCIALIST REALISM?

Lewis Nkosi has expressed some reservations about what he calls “the limitation of canvas” in La Guma's work which, he argues, prevents him from “exploring further and deepening the relationship between the characters”. He then goes on to argue that “except for Charlie Pauls none of the characters in *And A Threefold Cord* are given enough time and space to develop their individuality” (“The Man and His Work” 114). The significance of Nkosi’s comments for our purposes is that (without making any direct reference to Lukacs) they seem to capture very poignantly the notion of typicality as embodied in the portrayal of Charlie in the novel and thereby confirm the novel’s satisfaction of one of the tenets of Lukacs’s criteria for realism. Typicality, Lukacs maintains, is achieved “not with the loss of individuality in character portrayal but with the intensification of individuality” and this can only be determined when a character is compared to other characters within a particular fictional world. Finally, according to Lukacs

[an] artist achieves significance and typicality in characterization only when he successfully exposes the multifarious interrelationships between the character traits of his heroes and the objective general problems of the age and when he shows his characters directly grappling with the most abstract issues of the time as their own vital and personal problems. (*Writer and Critic* 154)

There is no doubt that La Guma's portrayal of Charlie Pauls meets these criteria - La Guma goes to great lengths in an attempt to demonstrate Charlie’s endeavour to grapple with the problems of the people of the pondokkie. He not only tries to identify their problems but he also tries to come to terms with what could be done to alleviate the situation. There is, however, a danger of conflating “typicality” with “topicality” here (*The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 123) especially in readings of the novel that, however indirectly, unproblematically regard Charlie as

a mouthpiece of the author's ideology and, by implication, interpret the novel as "illustrating literature" (Lukacs, *Solzhenitsyn* 12). I have in mind here readings such as that of Lindfors who argues that "...La Guma's message seems to be thrust upon his novel instead of springing from it" ("Form and technique" 51) and Gerald Moore who contends that the introduction of the "recollections" of Charlie in which he reiterates the utterances of the "rooker" is "forced and self-conscious" (112). I shall return to these arguments later.

Vladimir Klima correctly observes that the optimism of *And A Threefold Cord* is "remarkable since the author wrote it under difficult conditions" of repression and police surveillance (*Black Africa: Literature and Language* 147). Indeed *And A Threefold Cord* rejects the "fatalism" that is associated with naturalism not only in its characterization but also in its symbolism. This is embodied in both the birth of Caroline's child indicating a continuation of life (98) and in the symbolism of "one carnation" which grows on the dump in which young children such as Charlie's youngest brother Jorny play. As the narrator tells us: "The flower stands alone, gleaming, wonderfully bright, red as blood and life, like hope blooming in an anguished breast" (100). This blooming hope is finally captured in the sudden "darting [of] a bird from among the patchwork roof of the shanties [heading] straight, straight into the sky" (112). In this way birds are "associated with freedom" in the same way as they are in Gorky's allegorical tales, "Song of Stormy Petrel" and "Song of the Falcon" (Scherr 28). This leads to the next issue, the categorization of La Guma's realism in this novel.

Lindfors's assertions on the tendentiousness of the novel have justifiably been challenged by both Balutansky and Cornwell who provide ample examples to demonstrate how La Guma's "message" emerges organically from the political logic of the novel.⁵ Cornwell's argument is much more

relevant for our purposes because although he identifies in the novel “an analysis of South African society in terms of the fundamentalist Marxist ideology which La Guma brings to the work” (“La Guma's Forgotten Masterpiece” 6) and, with some reservations, also reads the novel as “socialist realist” (12), he acknowledges that the novel is not “simply a vehicle for propaganda” (6). Yet Cornwell’s reliance on the prescriptive Stalinist-Zhdanovite version of socialist realism in his analysis threatens to call into question, if not undermine, his contention that the novel is not simply a vehicle for propaganda. While I endorse the latter argument my categorization of La Guma's realism in this novel is slightly different from Cornwell’s. Since it is inevitable that any categorization of La Guma's realism in *And A Threefold Cord* will primarily revolve around the consciousness of the protagonist Charlie Pauls and the impact that the “rooker” has on him, it is to this that I will now turn.

In Charlie’s conversation (over a bottle of wine) with Uncle Ben, which shifts from concerns with the uncle’s excessive drinking habits to the fragile health of Dad Pauls and the poverty of the pondokkie dwellers, the narrative provides a clear picture of Charlie’s attempt to grapple with the issues that affect his community. Uncle Ben, obviously in reference to Dad Pauls, simply attributes to evil “what make[s] a poor old man shiver and shake himself to death in a leaking *pondok* without no warm soup and medicine”, but Charlie questions his moral explanation. He argues: “Ma read the Bible every night. It don’t make the poor old toppy any better” (49). Using the sayings of “a burg” who used to work with him “laying pipe” in Calvinia, Charlie attempts to provide what seems to him to be a more convincing explanation of the social realities:

There was burg working with us on the pipe....Know what he say? Always reading newspapers and things. He said to us, the poor don’t have to be poor.... This burg say, if the poor people all got together and took everything in the world,

there wouldn't be poor no more. Funny kind of talk, but it sounded alright...Further, this rooker say if all the stuff in the world was shared out among everybody, all would have enough to live nice. He reckoned people got to stick together to get this stuff. (50)

Initially, Uncle Ben's response is couched in religious terms: "Sound almost like a sin, that...Bible say you mustn't covet other people's things". When Charlie insists that, in his opinion, this "rooker did know what he was talking [about]", this elicits a response that is reminiscent of Mr Greene's to the taximan's assertion that the "colour bar is because of the capitalis' system" in *A Walk in the Night*: "I heard people talking like that....That's communis' things. Talking against the government" (50). This does not deter Charlie from justifying his argument:

"Listen", Charlie said..."Listen, Uncle Ben one time I went up to see Freda up by that people she work for, cleaning and washing. Hell, that people got a house *mos*, big as the effing city hall, almost, and there is an old bitch with purple hair and fat backsides and her husband eating off a table a mile long, with fancy candles and *dingus* on it. And a *juba* like me can't even touch the handle of the front door. You got to go round the back. Eating off nice shiny tables, plenty of roast meat and stuff..." (50)

This analogy is further developed as Charlie ponders over Alf and Caroline's failure to secure a house from council:

Is funny there got to be a lot of people like us, worrying about the roof every time it rain, and there's other people don't have to worry a damn. Living in wake-up houses like the house Freda work by, like I was telling Uncle Ben, or even just up the road here....Some people got no money, some people got a little money, some people got a helluva lot. Rooker I was working with laying that pipe, he reckon poor people ought to form a union, likely. (54-55)

What is one to make of Charlie's assertions in the novel?

Charlie's argument has elicited divergent responses from critics. According to Maughan-Brown, Charlie's "political insights are always second-hand, and generally consist of little more than disjointed reflections of the 'rooker' " (21). Gerald Moore also shares this view, adding that "[Charlie's] rather adventitious appeals to the rooker and his opinions" weaken La Guma's attempt "to show in [him] the dawns of an ideological consciousness" ("Through Suffering to Resistance" 112). For Cornwell, however,

Charlie's awareness of inequality and his crude conceptions of class are not second hand; although influenced by the politically informed labourer, they do not solely derive from him. On the contrary, they arise spontaneously and logically from Charlie's personal observation of enormous discrepancies in standards of living, an observation which has raised certain political questions to which Charlie demands political answers. ("Forgotten Masterpiece" 15)

While I share the view that Charlie's pronouncements are second-hand, showing a heavy reliance on the "rooker's sayings", I doubt that they are "always" so (as Maughan-Brown suggests), nor do I share Moore's claim that this weakens La Guma's rendering of "the dawns of political consciousness in Charlie". It could well be that La Guma felt that "these adventitious appeals to the rooker" would minimise the danger of the inflation of the hero's consciousness and strengthen the status of his work as an artistic production rather than propaganda. It is thus in keeping with La Guma's aesthetic considerations that the "political attitudes" should be "implied" and views expressed "unobtrusively" ("My Books have Gone Back Home" 72). Charlie's utterances are, to a certain extent, second-hand - not only does Charlie acknowledge the influence of the "rooker's" views on him and consistently appeal to his authority but he also uses phrases that are clearly meant to privilege the discourse of the rooker. The rooker's authority derives from his "reading of newspapers" (49) hence "he did know what he was talking" (50) because he is "a *slim burg*", "a clever fellow with a "lot of things in his head" (111). Despite his heavy reliance on the

authority of the rooker Charlie's political insights are not solely second-hand - from what the rooker told him, he is able to make appropriate extrapolations, for example, his apposite analogy about Freda's employers (50). But, does the fact that Charlie "speculates briefly about communism", a "poor people's union" and the "redistribution of wealth" (JanMohamed 242) warrant the categorization of the novel as socialist realist? A Gorkian model of realism would commend La Guma for having moved beyond the confines of critical realism which, according to Gorky, "criticizes everything" without affirming anything ("Soviet Literature" 343). For one thing, by advocating a "socialist humanism", via the sayings of the rooker, La Guma's protagonist establishes a status for himself as a "positive hero" (especially when compared to Michael Adonis in *A Walk in the Night*). In a word, through the sayings of the rooker, as articulated by Charlie, La Guma invests his protagonist with an "active romanticism which strives to strengthen man's will to live and raise him up against the life around him, against the yoke it would impose on him" (Gorky, "How I Learnt to Write" 35). The problem with this interpretation, however, is that Charlie's "consciousness" is not profound enough to provide the novel with a socialist perspective. It would seem, then, that a Lukacsian model offers a more useful explanation to deal with this problem in the realism of the novel. In so far as *And A Threefold Cord* "emphasizes the contradictions of capitalism" rather than "the forces working towards reconciliation" (Lukacs, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 114), it may be seen as employing the "indirect method" of analysis that Lukacs identifies in the realism of Thomas Mann. La Guma's realism differs from that of Mann, however, in that the class struggle in this novel is not seen "from a bourgeois point of view" (99). Nonetheless, the novel's satisfaction of one of the most crucial of Lukacs's criteria for critical realism, namely, "a negative attitude" towards capitalism and "a readiness to respect the perspective of socialism" (93), puts this work firmly within this tradition.

"SPONTANEITY/CONSCIOUSNESS DIALECTIC"

A number of critics interested in tracing the progressive development in La Guma's oeuvre have noted a remarkable feature in La Guma's characterization of his heroes. This is best summed up by Coetzee in the passage below:

The theme of La Guma's oeuvre clarifies itself...the growth of resistance from the aimless revolt of individuals without allies or ideology (anarchy, crime) [in *A Walk in the Night*] to the fraternal revolt of men who understand and combat oppression, psychological and physical. *And A Threefold Cord* reflected the dawn of man's conception of himself as a political creature; in *The Stone Country* the first cracks in the chaotic, defensive individualism of the oppressed appeared and alliances began to sprout; *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* presents both the political conception of man's fate and the fraternal alliance as accomplished facts. ("Man's Fate" 356)

In a similar vein, Piniel Shava, whose discussion of La Guma's work (curiously) omits *And A Threefold Cord*, confirms this development:

La Guma would like to demonstrate that the acquisition of class consciousness is also a slow and difficult process. From *A Walk in the Night* through *The Stone Country* to *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*... he shows how the political consciousness of his heroes develops in stages. (*A People's Voice* 37)

Taking the cue from both Coetzee and Shava I want to take this point further and argue that at the heart of the shift in each of La Guma's novels is Lenin's thesis on the "changeover from 'spontaneity' (*stikhiynost*) in the worker's protest movement to political awareness and from such an awareness (*sozaniye*) to revolutionary demonstration of their dissatisfaction" (Freeborn 43). Katherina Clarke explains how the "spontaneity/consciousness dialectic" as a "ritualized account of the Marxist-Leninist idea of historical progress" which constituted the "master plot of the Soviet novel" became integral in socialist realist texts (*The Soviet Novel* 15). Clarke also provides an illuminating explanation of the theoretical framework of the application of

“spontaneity/consciousness dialectic” in fiction:

In terms of this dialectical model consciousness is taken to mean actions or political activities that are controlled, disciplined and guided by politically aware bodies. Spontaneity means actions that are not guided by complete political awareness and are either sporadic, uncoordinated, even anarchic (such as wildcat strikes, mass uprisings), or can be attributed to the workings of vast impersonal historical forces rather than to deliberate actions....In the narrow context of the individual human being, as distinct from society at large, “consciousness” means political awareness and complete self-control that enables the individual to be guided in all his actions by his awareness, whereas “spontaneity” refers to purely visceral, wilful, anarchic, or self-centred actions. (15-16)

This framework is useful in contextualizing Charlie’s political development in the novel. After a humiliating experience, in which a policeman calls Freda a “[b]lerry black whore” and questions the respectability of Charlie and Freda (87-88) during the course of the raid in the shacks, Charlie decides to go out in order “to see what is happening to [his] people” (89). His concern with the treatment meted out to his people by the police prompts him not only to defy a policeman who is annoyed by the presence of the slum dwellers to watch the spectacle but also to give this policeman a forceful blow on his “exposed jawbone” and take to his heels (91). Although Charlie’s action is not self-centred nor anarchic, resulting as it does from his concern with his people, to call it “revolutionary” (“Forgotten Masterpiece” 6) as Cornwell does is perhaps to read too much into this undeniably politically positive gesture of defiance. Charlie is certainly “losing faith in the permanence of the system that oppresses [his class]” and beginning “to sense the need for collective resistance”, but his physical response to the policeman in this episode seems to be “more in the nature of outbursts of desperation and vengeance than that of struggle” (Lenin, *Selected Works* 114). In a word, his consciousness is again, in Lenin’s terms, in its “embryonic form” (113). Nothing provides more evidence of the “embryonic form” of Charlie’s consciousness than his uncertain and somewhat vague articulation of the “rooker’s” utterances

in his attempt to console Freda for losing her children.

He said something one time, about people most of the time takes trouble hardest when they alone. I don't know how it fit in here, hey. I don't understand it real right, you see. But this being had a lot of good things in his head. (111)

Unlike Charlie Pauls in *And A Threefold Cord*, George Adams, La Guma's protagonist in *The Stone Country*, is a fully-fledged political activist who is arrested and sent to prison for distributing leaflets of an illegal organisation. In prison, which is seen as a microcosm of South African society, Adams discovers that social interaction, not only between the prisoners and the guards but also amongst prisoners themselves, works according to the law of the jungle. Adams refuses to be reduced to that level of animal existence - he not only insists on his rights but also attempts to instill a sense of solidarity amongst the prisoners as a way of restoring their human dignity. In the meanwhile other fellow inmates are busy working on a daring bid to escape from prison which is thwarted when two of the prisoners are caught by the warders. The novel ends when a young prisoner, Albert March (alias the Casbah Kid), is being taken downstairs by the guards after being sentenced to death on a murder charge.

The shift from *And A Threefold Cord* to *The Stone Country* is suggestive of what Clarke has identified as the "road to consciousness". Like Charlie Pauls, George Adams rejects a naturalist, fatalistic and idealistic explanation of human fate, as the following interaction between him and the Casbah Kid clearly demonstrates:

"We all got to die. Hear me, mister, I put a knife in a *juba*. He went dead. Is put out, like. Everybody got his life and death put out, reckon and think..." "Put out?" George Adams asked. "You reckon so? Man, if our life was laid out for us beforehand, what use would it be for us to work to change things, hey?"

“Right, mister. You can’t change things, *mos*”. He chewed the cuticle of a thumb. “But hear me, chommy. People’s trying to change the things all the time.” (14)

Unlike Charlie, whose political insights are essentially second-hand, Adams’s materialist explanation and his unwavering belief in the possibility of change stem from his practice - as an activist he is part of the movement that seeks to effect change. La Guma provides a brief account of the growth Adams’s political commitment: “He had gone to meetings and had listened to speeches, had read a little, and had come to the conclusion that what had been said was right.... There’s limit to being kicked in the backside....” Adams’s view of his arrest also reflects his conviction regarding the justness of the cause. As the narrator puts it: “George Adams had no regrets about his arrest. You did what you decided was the right thing, and then accepted the consequences” (74).

Whereas Charlie’s actions against the police were indicative of “outbursts of desperation and vengeance”, as pointed out earlier, Adams’s actions are always suggestive of being acts of “struggle”. Adams stands out amongst his inmates in prison not only because he is aware of his rights but also because he is prepared to insist on them even if this includes defiance of the guards. While the other prisoners have been conditioned to cower in submission and accept the authority of the guards without question, Adams challenges them. Yusef, the Turk, one of Adams’s fellow inmates, sums up the attitude of the prisoners in his response to Adams’s reference to his rights: “Rights, you reckon you got rights, man? Listen mate, only the...warders got rights. *They* tell you what is rights?” (51). Although Adams acknowledges that Yusuf is correct in his suggestion: “You can do as you blerry well please, only don’t get in their way” (52), this does not deter him from fighting for his rights and earning the wrath of the guards (61-62). As Saratovskya correctly

observes: “The political consciousness, internal organization, and the sense of comradeship help Adams to preserve his human dignity, not only in his relations with the prisoners, but also with the warders” (165).

Adams’s attitude and his treatment of his fellow inmates are indeed suggestive of his political consciousness. The prison, we are informed in a distinctly La Gumaesque style, is populated by “a human salad” (80) of

Ragged street-corner hoodlums, shivering drunks, thugs in cheap flamboyant clothes and knowledgeable looks, murderers, robbers, housebreakers, petty criminals, rapists, loiterers and simple permit-offenders...(19).

We look at this world through the eyes of Adams whose point of view serves an important structural function of “linking the various parts of a rather disjointed story” (Rabkin 59):

In the half-world, hemmed in by stone and iron, there was an atmosphere of every-man-for-himself which George Adams did not like. He had grown up in the slums and he knew that here were the treacherous and the wily, the cringers and the bootlickers, the violent and the domineering, the smooth-talkers and the savage, the bewildered and the helpless; the strong preyed on the weak, and the strong and brutal acknowledged a sort of nebulous alliance among themselves for the terrorization of the underlings. (37)

But Adams tries to understand and identify with their plight and thereby affirm the words of the novel’s epigraph quoted from Eugene Debs: “While there is a lower class, I am in it/While there is a criminal element, I am of it/While there is a soul in jail, I am not free”. This is best exemplified in his guiding philosophy: “We all in this.... together” (38) which recurs in the novel. Accordingly, Adams’s political mission is to demonstrate his rejection of this atmosphere of every-man-for-himself by preaching the need for collective resistance: “Prisoners ought to

object....Strike for better diet, *mos*” (74). He even goes further in his demonstration of what Asein calls his “communalistic outlook...[which is suggestive of] the Marxist affirmation on which La Guma bases the thesis in this novel” (*The Man and His Work* 102) by sharing what he has with his inmates. In this way he may be seen as having embraced the ideal of a “socialist humanism” which Charlie Pauls nascently espouses in *And A Threefold Cord*.

Maughan-Brown has correctly identified Adams’s political activism as “notably low-key”. He goes on in a tone of implicit criticism:

he wins respect by the dignity of example, sharing food and cigarettes and insisting on his rights, rather than by political argument, and the rationale for becoming politically involved presented by the novel is fairly rudimentary: “There’s limit to being kicked in the backside... (“Adjusting the Focal Length” 21)

Although La Guma does not explicitly elaborate on the rationale for Adams’s political involvement he does indicate that Adams decides to be politically involved after listening to the speeches in political meetings and feeling convinced that “what had been said was right”, but Maughan-Brown does not make reference to this statement which precedes the one he cites because it would undermine his argument referred to above. Yet, as Mzamane and Tadi point out: “...George Adams stands out as the revolutionary flame that kindles the hearts of the oppressed, as a morale booster and a conscientizer” (“Martyr of the South African Struggle” 7).

Perhaps more than in the case of Charlie Pauls in the previous novel one is tempted to argue that Adams is a “positive hero” in the same way as in the Soviet socialist realist novel, for there is no doubt that he not only “exemplif[ies] moral and political virtue” (Clarke, 46) but he also serves a “didactic function” (47) through his “extraordinary dedication and self-deprivation” (49) as seen

in his willingness to share everything he has with his inmates. This may not have been a conscious intention on the author's part but Adams's relationship with both Yusef the Turk and the Casbah Kid would seem to reinforce this interpretation. In this regard Adams could be seen as a political "mentor" who, albeit to a limited extent, conscientizes these characters who eventually turn out to be his "disciples". "People like you, we got to look after, *mos*" (70), says Yusef in an attempt to provide a rationale for his protection of George Adams from Butcherboy. In addition, Adams's political principles gradually earn him the respect of the Casbah Kid whose initial reluctance to interact with him is likened to "prying open the jammed door of a vault" (12). In spite of these hints though it would be exaggerated to claim that La Guma was making a serious gesture towards socialist realism.

The subjects of *The Stone Country*, like those of the works discussed earlier, are also drawn from La Guma's journalism.⁶ There is in this work still evidence of La Guma's descriptive prose, but he has now become more economical in his selection of details that count - devoting most of his descriptions to the creation of portraits of prison character types which depict their reduction to animal existence. In effect, La Guma's naturalist style is here modified by symbolism which is in line with the allegorical nature that he accords this prison. Or is it that as La Guma firmly establishes himself as a fiction writer traces of the documentary style which is drawn from his journalism begin to disappear? Whatever the reason, this transition does not diminish La Guma's aesthetic achievements in this novel.

Carpenter argues that in this novel La Guma "reaches for a nineteenth-century in which biological and cultural evolution are indistinguishable" ("Ovals, Spheres...88). Indeed La Guma's extensive focus on "the brute in man" (Horton, *Backgrounds of American Literary Thought* 267), especially

in his portrayal of Butcherboy, would link him with the naturalism of Jack London. But La Guma's resort to animal imagery in this case is understandable since it is consistent with his intention of showing the prevalence of the "law of the jungle" in this prison. Moreover, George Adams's "control over his destiny" (JanMahomed 249) and his optimism, which provide the essential ingredients for the novel's critical realist perspective (as embodied in La Guma's allegorical reference to South Africa as a prison), subvert this naturalism and foreground the shift in La Guma's next work, *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, as a pointer to revolutionary political action.

NOTES

1. The characters in the short story are, with some slight changes, the same as those in the novel.
2. La Guma's treatment of weather is at times reminiscent of Gorky's handling of weather in the short story, "One Autumn", or lengthy descriptions of nature in the same author's story "Malva". Here is one example from "One Autumn":

The rain drummed relentlessly on the wooden boat, the muffled noise suggesting sad thoughts, and the wind whistled....The waves of the river slapped against the bank, they sounded monotonous and hopeless, as though they were telling of something inexpressively boring and unpleasant....The sound of the rain became one with their slapping....The wind rushed blindly...on and on, singing cheerless songs...(Selected Stories 181)

La Guma employs personification in a similar way in his description of weather in *And A*

Threefold Cord:

The rain leaned against the house, under the pressure of the wind, hissing and rattling on the corrugated iron sides, scouring the roof. The wind flung the rain against the house in a roar, as if in anger, and turned away, leaving only a steady hissing along the poorly painted blistered metal. (3)

Such descriptions abound in La Guma's novel.

3. For this quotation I am indebted to Michael Denner, a graduate student at Northwestern's Department of Slavic Languages and Literature, who translated this article for me from

Russian into English.

4. The term frontier here is used not only as a marker of a physical boundary (like the road that serves as a line of demarcation between Mostert's garage and the shanties) but also in a psychological sense in cases where racial prejudice hampers normal social interaction. The frontier is "open" when there is social interaction, and it is "closed" when the prejudices are allowed to define the relationship between "races".
5. See Balutansky (43-50) and Cornwell (11-18).
6. See for example "Ten Days in Roeland Street Jail" and "Law of the Jungle". Later, La Guma wrote the short story, "Tatto Marks and Nails", which is set in prison and whose protagonist, Ahmed the Turk, seems to be an earlier version of the creation of Yusef the Turk in the novel. For another journalistic account of the prison conditions in South African jails see Sonia Bunting's "The Prisons of Apartheid" which provides factual accounts of what went on in these prisons. *The Stone Country* also draws on La Guma's experiences and that of his inmates in prisons where he served numerous short spells, as La Guma himself points out in his interview with Cecil Abrahams.

CHAPTER SIX

A NARRATIVE OF RESISTANCE : GESTURES TOWARDS SOCIALIST REALISM IN *IN THE FOG OF THE SEASONS' END*

It is not enough for South African art merely to idealise the negation of the racist way of life. Art must be warmed by the fires of the struggle for liberty. (Gala, "Hello or Goodbye Athol Fugard" 104)

The political logic of La Guma's fourth novel, *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* would seem to be in line with the above statement made by the author in his critique of Athol Fugard's plays in 1974 (two years after the publication of this work). La Guma makes this more explicit when he tells us that this novel was meant to serve as an indication that "we have protested enough and that we must now fight" ("The Real Picture" 26). To this end *In the Fog* takes as its subject the underground phase of the struggle against the South African government in the 1960s. Beukes, a member of an underground cell of the movement, whose co-ordinator is Elias Tekwane, organizes the distribution of leaflets of this organisation for the purposes of propaganda work. He moves from one hideout to another in an attempt to evade the police network and, in the process, interacts with characters who, while somewhat sympathetic to the movement (or, at least, understand his mission), avoid any direct political involvement. When one of the members of his political cell, Isaac, does not show up for their appointment at an agreed rendezvous, Beukes becomes worried. Subsequently, in a meeting with Elias Tekwane at a house in the township, the police launch a surprise raid on their meeting place arresting Elias Tekwane and shooting Beukes who, nonetheless, succeeds in avoiding arrest.

In a police station later, Elias refuses to compromise with the police who want him to reveal the identity of his comrades and is ultimately tortured to death. In the meantime, after receiving medical attention from a sympathetic doctor, Beukes gets to Henry April's house where he sees off three volunteers of the movement (including Isaac) as they are transported by April to a neighbouring country for military training. As the novel ends Beukes focuses his gaze on "the children [who] are gathered in the sunlit yard" (181).

With the exception of *A Walk in the Night* none of La Guma's novels has elicited as much critical attention as this work. This critical interest is not just attributable to the reputation that La Guma had by then established for himself as a writer but it also seems to have a lot to do with the fact that *In the Fog* is far more ambitious than La Guma's earlier fictional projects not only in terms of technique but also in terms of scope. A number of critics have bestowed accolades on this work and lauded La Guma's aesthetic achievement. Amongst these is Asein for whom the novel is indicative of "the articulation of a radical perspective without injury to the artistic integrity of the work itself" (*The Man and His Work* 120) as well as Maughan-Brown who describes it as "a political novel whose stature invites a comparison with novels of Africa's two major political novelists, Sembene Ousmane and Ngugi" ("Adjusting the Focal Length" 120)¹. For Emmanuel Ngara the novel is significant for its socialist vision (116). A. Arab is ambivalent: he argues that although the novel depicts a "growing revolutionary consciousness of the South African majority without unduly sacrificing the form" the propagandist orientation of the narrative "often looms large and results in a detrimental oversimplification" (*Politics and the Novel in Africa* 206). Adrian Roscoe would seem to concur with this view in his contention that the artistic integrity of this work is adversely affected by the fact that La Guma has, in his words, "become impatient with the subtleties of high art and must spell everything out" (*Uhuru's Fire* 253-254). Other critics

also have some serious reservations about this work. Foremost amongst these is Rabkin who contends that

in [La Guma's] latest work there appears to be a departure from the concerns best served by fiction as such. It has naturally affected the quality of the writer's artistry. Clearly, a crisis has arisen in the relation between form and content. ("La Guma and Reality in South Africa" 60-61)

Gareth Cornwell who seems to endorse this view goes even further arguing that *In the Fog* is "ominous in the sense that it points to the end of La Guma's career as a novelist" ("Protest in Fiction" 156).

As can be inferred, it is with the overtly political nature of the novel that these critics seem to have a problem. But while it is obvious that *In the Fog* represents a different point of departure in La Guma's fiction and that perhaps there may be some legitimate issues to be raised about form, one doubts the justification of the argument that there is a "crisis in relation between form and content" in this work. Instead it seems to me that in this work, which is clearly provided as a narrative of resistance, form is, to a large extent, consistent with content. Furthermore, while La Guma's novel is clearly meant to have an ideological effect on its readers, to suggest that the "propagandist element looms large" to such an extent that it leads to a "detrimental oversimplification" is not entirely convincing. For one thing, although there is a clear bias towards the working class in the novel, there is hardly any heavy reliance on a discussion of theory or ideology, as Robert Green correctly observes ("The Politics of Subversion" 88). It is, however, not my concern here to intervene in this debate although my views on this issue may become clearer during the course of my argument in this chapter. My project is rather to show that *In the Fog* signals a different point of departure from the earlier works in terms of the nature

of La Guma's realism.

RESISTANCE POLITICS

One of the most remarkable features of La Guma's novels is the consistency with which they refer to and, perhaps most significantly, reject fatalistic and uncritical naturalist assumptions. In *A Walk in the Night*, as was pointed out earlier, the taximan identifies the problem of the proletariat, as represented by Michael Adonis, as the “capitalist system” and not inexplicable fate. In *And A Threefold Cord* the attribution of the socio-economic position of the poor in the pondokkies to predestination is also rejected by Charlie Pauls. Similarly, in *The Stone Country* Adams takes issue with the fatalistic attitude of the Casbah Kid who argues that life is “put out” for people and, by implication, that nothing could be done to change the situation. This uncritical submission to fate is again challenged by Beukes in *In the Fog* in his conversation with Beatie Adams, a baby sitter working in white suburbs:

‘We all good enough to be servants. Because we’re black they think we good enough just to change their nappies.’ She said, hesitantly, wondering if it would be the right answer, ‘That’s life, isn’t it?’ It wasn’t, she could feel it, because he said, ‘Life? Why should it be our life? We’re as good or bad as they are.’ ‘Yes, I reckon so?’ The brown eyes smiled.... there are things people can do, his voice was not sleepy, ‘I’m not saying a person can change it tomorrow or next year. But even if you don’t get what you want today, soon, it’s a matter of pride, dignity. You follow me?’ (11)

It is precisely this unwavering belief in the inevitability of change that serves as the impetus for Beukes’s and other characters’ involvement in the liberation struggle in this text. What this work in effect celebrates is the way in which the oppressed take control of their own fate.

So if, as shown earlier, the early novels were suggestive of Lukacs's assertion that in any protest against the social conditions those conditions themselves should be central to the narrative. In this work it is as though La Guma is saying: now that you have learnt about the socio-economic conditions that the oppressed have to contend with, the point does not need labouring. This would seem to explain the diminishing role of a naturalist style that characterises his earlier novels. For La Guma's interest in this work lies in the forces working towards the changing of the status quo rather than in the exposition of the social contradictions of racial capitalism as such, as was the case especially in *A Walk in the Night* and *And A Threefold Cord*.

This does not of course suggest that La Guma completely dispenses with his naturalist style, as can be seen in his rendering of the pathetic sight of an old woman who has apparently been evicted from her house (28-29), which is marked by a distinctly "La Gumaesque" descriptive prose and attention to detail - which include not only her appearance and her clothing but also a catalogue of the old lady's paraphernalia that has been removed from the house. There are also some passages in the novel which are clearly reminiscent of La Guma's descriptions of the tenements of District Six in *A Walk in the Night*, as exemplified below:

On the dim staircase the air was heavy with old odours of broken lavatories and dustbins, all mingled to form a factor *not unassociated with exhumed graves*. Night had not cooled the atmosphere inside the grimy building and Beukes climbed into the gloom and the smell like *a grave-robber who had just broken into a tomb*. Behind the anonymous doors poverty had retreated into unpeaceful sleep, and the hallway to Tommy's was deserted except for a dried trail of tea-leaves and curling scraps of paper. The floorboards cracked and snapped underfoot as he made his way tiredly towards Tommy's room, *like a weary swimmer breasting the sea*. (134) (Emphasis added)

This is stylistically interesting in the sense that the generalising effect of the use of plural nouns (“odours”, “lavatories”, “dustbins”, “doors”, “leaves”, “scraps”, “floorboards”), together with interpretive metaphors (as indicated in italics above), are suggestive of an allegorizing dimension which goes well beyond the naturalistic description in La Guma’s earlier work. Where such details are provided, however, they are (perhaps even more than in the earlier novels) subordinated to the actions of the characters and the overall interpretive framework, again dispelling any association of La Guma's work with the arbitrariness of Zola’s naturalism.

In fact one might even venture to say that La Guma goes some way towards providing a “total picture” of the historical period under consideration without a heavy reliance on naturalistic details in this work. The true artistic totality, Lukacs argues, depends on the completeness of the picture it presents of the essential social factors that determine the world depicted (*Studies in European Realism* 147). La Guma attempts to achieve this through the Lukacsian sense of “perspective” in terms of which the direction in which characters develop is determined (*The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 33). The novel not only provides biographical information on how some of the protagonists become politically involved but it also shows, without the utter condemnation that is characteristic of post-1976 South African fiction by black writers, how other characters shun politics for different reasons. Tommy, for example, finds it “easier to live under the regime than to oppose it” (53). Although Bennet uses his wife as a scapegoat for distancing himself from political activity it is clear that he has been cowed into submission. His fear and that of the others like him, has, nevertheless, to be understood within the context of Elias Tekwane’s experience and his eventual death in a police “torture chamber”.

The historical context is the post-Sharpeville period of intense repression, making open political activity difficult and leading to the waging of the underground struggle against the government. La Guma's major interest lies in depicting this particular phase in the oppositional politics of national liberation. It is, amongst other things, through this provision of "a concrete historical situation, a datable and locatable frame" (Schipper, *Beyond the Boundaries* 133) that La Guma's work invites itself to be read as a realist text. In writing a novel that is steeped in an identifiable historical context La Guma follows the example of both Sembene Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* and Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*, novels with which his work has been seen as inevitably inviting a comparison.

THE GORKIAN CONNECTION

It is not, however, Ousmane and Ngugi that La Guma looked up to as literary models in his writing of this novel, but the inspiration seems to have stemmed from his reading of Gorky's novel *Mother*. Writing in 1977 La Guma recalled how as a youngster he first acquired Gorky's works from a local bookshop. The occasion was a questionnaire sent by the editors of *Soviet Literature* to a number of writers from different parts of the world (including La Guma and Ronnie Kasrils, amongst others) inviting them to respond to the question, "In what way have Soviet authors been of interest to you?" In response La Guma went on to point out:

Gorky showed me that ordinary people could be heroes of books; that there was dignity in the common man; that even "the lower depths" could produce profound manifestations of humanity... Altogether, I might say that Gorky introduced me to working class literature and the spirit of socialism that goes with it. ("Answers to our questionnaire" 116)

In the argument that follows I hope to show that, although La Guma does not specifically mention Gorky's *Mother* in this statement above, he could have had it in mind when this statement was made and that this consideration could have informed his writing of *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*.

Mother provides a fictional account of an actual incident, a May Day demonstration that took place in the Volga town of Somov in 1902 (Clarke 52). In recreating the story Gorky does not only focus on the May Day workers' demonstration itself but also employs the "spontaneity/consciousness dialectic" in his depiction of Nilovna, Pavel Vlasov's mother, who in her eagerness to know about her son's passionate involvement and subversive activities in a clandestine socialist organisation, gradually becomes politicized. What really becomes a catalyst for the mother's full political involvement is her son's arrest culminating in his trial and exile following his leading role in the May Day demonstration. The novel ends when Nilovna, who has by now become a political firebrand in her own right, is tortured to death for distributing leaflets that justify the actions of her son and his comrades.

One of the aspects that La Guma admired in Gorky's *Mother* was the fact that this novel depicts characters whose lives are steeped in "concrete, historical lines reflecting actual life and activities of progressive men (sic) in Russian society of the earlier part of this century" ("What I learned from Maxim Gorky" 167).² La Guma not only found in Gorky's novel a realistic picture of the Russia of the time, but also what he saw as closer to

a picture of the efforts of [his] people in South Africa struggling against injustice. I saw coloured factory workers and African labourers organising against economic exploitation...I saw the cynicism and cold-heartedness of the South African police;

I saw both the wavering elements and the courageous among my own people.
(167)

This obviously calls to mind the actions of politically committed characters such as Beukes and Isaac; Elias's involvement in the laundry workers' strike (133) and his uncompromising stance despite torture after his arrest, and the "wavering elements" such as Bennet and Flotman, the teacher, whose middle class security becomes a problem in relation to his total involvement in the struggle in La Guma's text. Although one may not unequivocally claim that La Guma's reading of *Mother* predates his writing of *In the Fog*, his link, however indirectly, of his work to Gorky's is significantly suggestive, for not only does it invite a comparison of these novels but it also hints at *Mother* as being La Guma's "intertextual referent" (Chambers, "Alter Ego" 143).

One can, of course, draw some parallels between these two novels. For both novels seem to owe their existence to the authors' attempts to provide fictional representations of historical realities. However, while it has been argued that *Mother* seems to follow, albeit with some distortions, the actual incident to which it refers, *In the Fog* would seem to draw on different historical events for the purposes of providing authenticity to the imaginatively created world. The stylized reconstruction of the Sharpeville massacre provided by La Guma's narrative by means of flashback in chapter nine remains a historical allusion that provides the novel with its "internal frame" (Furst, *Through the Lens of the Reader* 134). There are other relatively significant similarities in terms of plot such as the earning of martyrdom through death by torture in the case of both Nilovna and Elias, the fact that Elias's father like Pavel's in *Mother* dies in an accident at work and that both Pavel and Elias gain political consciousness, not only from their experience as workers but also through an extensive reading of books. The working class bias of both novels is also striking. Despite these similarities, however, La Guma's novel remains rooted in South African social

reality and to read too much into the similarities could lead to oversimplification. La Guma's probable identification of his intertext is, nonetheless, illuminating.

However, as John Frow points out, what is crucial “to textual interpretation is not in itself, the identification of a particular intertextual source but more the discursive structure (genre, discursive formation, ideology) to which it belongs”. What counts therefore, Frow adds, is the ability of the critic to “reconstruct the cultural codes which are realised (and contested) in texts” and this can be done by providing “an account of the work performed upon intertextual material and its functional integration in the later text” (“Intertextuality and ontology” 46). This theoretical framework is important for our purposes in the sense that *Mother*, to which La Guma seems to acknowledge his indebtedness, is more than just an epic novel of contemporary Russia but was also canonised as an exemplary socialist realist text in the Soviet Union. What made *Mother* a precursor socialist realist novel was not just its sympathetic portrayal or, perhaps more accurately, its celebration of working class vanguardism but also, *inter alia*, its employment of the Leninist spontaneity/consciousness dialectic, the creation of positive heroes and, most significantly, the socialist perspective that the novel adopts. The question that arises for an intertextual analysis, then, is: to what extent, if at all, does La Guma absorb some of these cultural codes in *Mother* and rework them in tandem with his fictional world? Or, more specifically, is *In the Fog* a socialist realist text and, if so, what are the modalities for its endorsement of this tradition?

SOCIALIST REALISM : THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Although some critics have, albeit indirectly, linked La Guma's work, and more specifically *In the Fog*, to the socialist realist tradition, there has been an apparent reluctance amongst them to engage with this aspect of La Guma's work more critically.³ Whether this reluctance could be attributed to some reluctance on the part of the critics to associate La Guma's work with the Stalinist-Zhdanovite version of socialist realism, or a perception that the socialist realist tradition is the prerogative of writers from socialist countries, is a matter for speculation. Socialist realism is, however, not a monolithic tradition, or in the words of Katherine Clarke, "there are many different socialist realisms and different critics have evolved different definitions of it" (*The Soviet Novel* 3). Therefore, although I find Lukacs's formulations on this aesthetic useful tools for my analysis of La Guma's novel, I do not share Lukacs's idea of privileging works produced from socialist countries as the only ones that have access to this tradition (*Realism in Our Time* 107). As a matter of fact the first socialist realist text, *Mother*, itself predates not only the term but also the transition to socialism in Russia which brought in its wake the existence of the Soviet Union. For this reason one cannot accept this aspect of Lukacs's argument. Despite this flaw in his argument, however, Lukacs rejects the Stalinist-Zhdanovite version of socialist-realism on aesthetic grounds - herein lies the significance of Lukacs's theory for our purposes. For, if La Guma seems to endorse the Stalinist-Zhdanovite version of socialist realism in his extra-fictional statements (as shown in chapter two), this is not put into practice in his fiction, as will be argued below.

According to Lukacs, socialist realism differs from critical realism not only in being based on a concrete socialist perspective but also in using this perspective to describe the forces working towards socialism from the inside (*The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 93). There is no doubt that *In the Fog* goes some way towards meeting this criterion. La Guma's text is "a

product of socialist consciousness” (Chennels, “Pastoral and Anti-Pastoral Elements in Alex La Guma's Later Novels” 39) not only because it provides a class analysis of the struggle but also because it identifies the working class as a force working towards a better future and “[adopts its] historical viewpoint” (Fischer, *The Necessity of Art* 110). Isaac, we are told, earns the hatred of his fellow white workers (113) and the respect of his fellow black workers because of his militancy and his working class consciousness: “He was considered to ‘have brains’ because he understood many things others in his circle did not, but he also ‘had nerve’ because he challenged every little incident of unfairness and injustice” (114). His own attitude to his white colleagues is even more telling in this regard. He feels “almost sorry for these people who believed themselves to be the Master Race...” (115) because “...they had been stupefied into supporting a system which had to bust one day and take them all down with it...” (114). In a word, he sees them as mere cogs in a capitalist machinery. The novel’s endorsement of a class analysis of the struggle is epitomised in Elias Tekwane’s thoughts: “...we are not only humbled as Blacks, but also as workers: our blackness is only a pretext” (131). Like Gorky’s *Mother*, *In the Fog* embraces working class vanguardism. This is not only borne out in the heroic roles assigned to Elias Tekwane, Isaac and Beukes but also in a discussion between Abdulla and Beukes in which the pivotal role on the working class in the struggle is underscored. By endorsing a class analysis of the struggle and underlining the pivotal role of the working class, the novel could be seen as inviting itself to be read as socialist realist text.

However, as Lukacs correctly observes: “the struggle for socialism varies in form and content according to the level of development of a particular country” (*The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* 93). La Guma seems to have taken this into consideration in his writing of this novel. For his work attempts to depict a national liberation phase of the struggle at a time when the dawn

of socialism in South Africa was but a remote ideal. So, unlike many socialist realists whom Lukacs accuses of “[neglecting] the national character of class struggles, stressing only their social nature” (*Realism in Our Time* 110), La Guma cannot afford to overlook this aspect of struggle in the local context. As Arab points out: “...La Guma seems to have put his Marxist politics at the service of nationalism” (220). Moreover, there is in the novel a recognition that the nationalist liberation phase of the struggle will be a protracted one. Despite the novel’s optimism, therefore, it could hardly be expected (especially at the time the novel was written) that it could predict “the victory of the socialist revolution” even if symbolically⁴ - such a gesture would have been tantamount to “revolutionary romanticism” or, at worst, could lead to the novel being read as “illustrating literature” (Lukacs, *Solzhenitsyn* 12). La Guma avoids this pitfall by writing a novel that is (with minimum distortion) rooted in the socio-historical realities of the period under consideration. It is precisely this pragmatism on La Guma's part that provides his work with a “perspective...of modest proportions” (Királyfalvi, *The Aesthetics of Gyorgy Lukacs* 69) and rescues the novel from the dogmatist Stalinist-Zhdanovite version of socialist realism.

Yet there are other ways in which *In the Fog* gravitates towards socialist realism and points to *Mother* as its intertextual referent. Like *Mother* La Guma's work attempts to depict a collective programme of political resistance - the result is a number of characters who in one way or another try to grapple with the problem of oppression and state repression. La Guma's success in “reflecting” (through fiction) the collective will of the people has elicited different responses from critics commenting on characterization in this novel. Mzamane, for example, argues that the novel has no heroes in the conventional sense of characters with outstanding qualities (“Sharpeville and Its Aftermath” 38) while Jane Watts contends that La Guma's subordination of the individual to a collective cause is suggestive of “a genuine attempt [on the author’s part] to

eradicate the personality cult and the notion of the heroic leader figure” (*Black Writers from South Africa* 214). Again La Guma points to Gorky’s *Mother* as his intertext in this regard:

what was important in *Mother* was that Gorky had found a new relationship between the individual and society. Here conflicts were no longer clashes between individuals driven by their own limited interests, but they were struggles of communities for the basic aims and ideals of life. There was no longer a single person revolting against society, but the spirit of social consciousness and collective effort pulses through this book in which the *individual freed from narrow self-centred concerns, is absorbed by the collective and finds inspiration therein*. (“What I learned from Gorky” 166) (My emphasis)

It is obviously these aspects in Gorky’s work that La Guma attempts to integrate in his text, as will be shown below.

Although the comments made by Mzamane and Watts above are convincing, in so far as they create the impression that the novel is anti-heroic they might obfuscate the fact that the text endorses the notion of positive heroes in almost the same way that *Mother* does in its portrayal of Nilovna and Pavel. The fact that Beukes, Isaac and Tekwane are “ordinary people” with a collective responsibility should not distract our attention from the reality that they are meant to be positive heroes who “exemplify moral and political virtue” and provide a sense of direction for the oppressed. Their dedication to and support of the working class struggle and the fight for national liberation is made clear in the different sacrifices they make in order to facilitate this process. Beukes sacrifices his life with his family and uses hideouts to promote the clandestine work of his cell. His dedication to the struggle is, for example, admired by his contact, Flotman, who wants to know the impetus behind this diligence:

Flotman said, “Tchah. But I admire the way you boppers go ahead. Nothing

seems to stop you. What drives you?' 'Drives? Nothing drives us,' Beukes replied. 'We understand our work, so we enjoy it. It is rarely that one is happy in one's work.' '...I'm not like you. Your heart is too big, Beukes. Too big.' (87)

Isaac is also envied by his fellow workers who look up to him for guidance until he leaves the country for military training. By endowing these characters with attributes that are admired by members of the oppressed the text presents these characters as revolutionary models to be emulated. As is well known the notion of the positive hero became a "defining feature of Soviet Socialist Realism" (Clarke 46) - by endorsing this concept therefore La Guma's text leans towards socialist realism.

Furthermore, La Guma's positive heroes are imbued with a sense of "proletarian humanism". Proletarian humanism, Lukacs tells us, in his chapter, "Gorki's Human Comedy", "is not merely a distant goal of the revolutionary working-class movement - each step in it is at the same time the attainment of this goal in the personal lives of those who take part in the movement" (*Studies in European Realism* 236). This is best exemplified in Elias Tekwane in whose character perhaps even more than the others, the notion of the positive hero is embodied. The characterization of Elias has an affinity to the master plot of the Soviet novel. According to Clarke the

Master plot personalizes the general processes outlined in Marxist-Leninist historiography by encoding them in biographical terms: the positive hero passes in stages from a state of relative "spontaneity" to a higher degree of consciousness not by class conflict but through the working-out of the so-called *spontaneity/consciousness* dialectic. (*The Soviet Novel* 16)

The biographical details on Elias Tekwane that the novel provides seem to be indicative of La Guma's employment of the "spontaneity/consciousness dialectic". Tekwane is initially a naïve country boy whose father dies in the mines. He begins to work at Mr Wasserman's shop and

becomes an avid reader of books. In this respect his portrayal immediately calls to mind Pavel's assertion in *Mother*: "We working men must study. We must find out and understand why our lives are so hard" (20). Although Tekwane gains some knowledge from books it appears that his subsequent actions are not guided by political consciousness until he meets a fellow prisoner, Mdlaka, in a labour transit camp after his involvement in a laundry labour strike in the city. Mdlaka serves as his political mentor who recruits him to the movement (156). It is only after he has joined the movement that Elias's activities are shown to be a result of his political consciousness. In the light of the above, La Guma's comment on Gorky's *Mother* cited earlier (namely, the liberation of the "individual from narrow self-centred concerns" into the concerns of the collective) is more telling. Perhaps more significant is the fact that Elias Tekwane, like Nilovna in *Mother*, pays the highest price for his political involvement. He earns his political martyrdom when he is killed by the security forces during interrogation.

NOTES

1. Leonard Kiberia and Simon Gikandi also have high regard for the text's aesthetic value.
2. I am grateful to B. Chandramohan for sending me a copy of this article.
3. Mzamane and Tadi, for example, call La Guma a Socialist Realist but do not elaborate on this aspect of the author's work.
4. I think Ngara reads too much into La Guma's symbolism when he argues that the sun that rises in the east is La Guma's way of expressing the victory that comes from the east, the victory of the socialist revolution (97).

CHAPTER SEVEN

READING THE IDEOLOGICAL CONTRADICTIONS IN *TIME OF THE BUTCHERBIRD*

For those readers and critics interested in La Guma's craftsmanship, the political logic of *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* raises certain expectations about this author's subsequent work. The assumption is that since *In the Fog* ends with activists leaving the country for military training in a neighbouring state, the next novel would have as its subject an armed confrontation between the returned freedom fighters and the forces of the state. *Time of the Butcherbird* does not really meet these expectations. For its protagonists are not militarily trained returned activists nor does the novel itself really celebrate such an armed confrontation. Instead, the central focus of the text is on the contradictions of racial capitalism examined against the backdrop of a rural community under threat of a forced removal - which is prompted by the government's discovery of mining resources in the area. Also central to the plot is the unfolding drama of Shilling Murile's quest to avenge his brother's death at the hands of Hans Meulen and Opperman. Such content in La Guma's last published novel has been seen by critics such as David Maughan- Brown as "a step backwards rather than forwards" ("Adjusting the Focal Length : Alex La Guma and Exile" 27). In fact, with the exception of such critics as Scarlet Whitman and Gerald Moore, who is impressed by what he calls "the poetic interpretation of landscape and action" ("Through Suffering and Resistance" 120), and a few others,¹ this novel has generally not been well received. Felix Mnthali, for example, sees *Time of the Butcherbird* as "lack[ing] verve". According to this critic, the novel's "revolutionary fervour overwhelms [its] artistic completeness" ("Common Grounds in the Literatures of Black America and Southern Africa" 49). On the whole, the critical

reception of *Time of the Butcherbird* has largely been marked by a comparison of this novel to La Guma's earlier novels. Thus we find Abdul JanMahomed contending that this novel fails to rise to the occasion because it lacks "the subtle and complex insights of the previous novel" (*Manichean Aesthetics* 260). This comparative perspective is perhaps best epitomised in Mbulelo Mzamane's essay, "Sharpeville and its Aftermath", in which he comments, *inter alia*, on what he sees as a change in La Guma's "intended" audience in this work, La Guma's "putting of Sesotho words in the mouths of Xhosa-speaking Africans", and "a lack of concreteness" about the novel. He concludes:

Time of the Butcherbird lacks the authenticity and penetration of his earlier work in its evocation of the social milieu in which his characters move, a shortcoming which a number of his readers close to the source will immediately recognize. (40)

It is precisely these aspects of *Time of the Butcherbird* that Maughan-Brown, following Mzamane, draws on to back up his claim that there are "awkwardness[es] and anomalies ... in every area of this novel - from narrative technique to the depiction of setting to characterization, to dialogue to plot" ("Adjusting the Focal Length" 30). Maughan-Brown attributes some of these "anomalies" to the fact that the novel was produced under conditions of exile. In his own words: "The enforced adjustment of the focal length consequent on exile has blurred the focus and dulled the sharp edge of the realism which had served La Guma's purposes so well in earlier novels" (36). What Maughan-Brown and Mzamane have in common with regard to this novel, then, are their reservations about La Guma's aesthetic achievement - the difference, however, is that, elsewhere, Mzamane acknowledges this work's "revolutionary import" ("Alex La Guma : Martyr of the South African Struggle" 10).

Some of the criticism levelled against this work is, of course, justified - I must admit, for example, that on reading the novel I could not stop wondering why Africans in the Karoo speak Zulu instead of Xhosa. It seems to me, however, that a stringently comparative perspective (as adopted by some of these critics) denies *Time of the Butcherbird* its validity as a text in its own right. *Time of the Butcherbird*, it could be argued, represents a significant point of departure not only for La Guma himself but also for his scholarship. For one thing, it was, according to Abrahams, the first of La Guma's longer works "to be conceived and written in its entirety [in exile]" (*Alex La Guma* 118). For another, it is also the first of La Guma's novels to focus attention on the rural struggles of the peasantry. Furthermore, *Time of the Butcherbird* renders visible La Guma's conscious attempt "to represent human experience across the colour line in South Africa" (Tremaine 31).

La Guma's fictional project in *Time of the Butcherbird* is, arguably, far more ambitious than that of his previous novels not just in terms of its "broad historical sweep" which in its coverage includes "glimpses of precolonial times and the Boer War to the urban anti-government demonstration of the late seventies" (Gagiano 59) but, most significantly, in terms of its interracial representation. That La Guma should have written a truly representative South African novel at some point in his career does not, however, come as a surprise. As early as 1966 in his interview with Robert Serumaga La Guma expressed his concerns about the difficulties that racial discrimination presented for a writer trying "to project [himself/herself] across the colour line" ("Alex La Guma" 92). This preoccupation is reiterated in La Guma's 1975 essay, "South African Writing under Apartheid":

No writer in South Africa can see life steady and see it whole. Out of his own experience he can only tell what he has seen and known, and this is inevitably only part of the total picture. No White writer has yet managed to create a real and convincing Black character, and vice versa. Nor has any writer, White or Black, been able to describe the relations between White and Black which are accurate and valid for both parties. (18)

Time of the Butcherbird (which was published four years later) would seem to be a direct product of this preoccupation. For it is precisely these limitations that La Guma attempts to transcend as a means of providing a “total picture” of the South African situation in this work. To this end the novel explores the relationship not only between Blacks and Whites but also between Afrikaners and English-speaking South Africans - a coverage that is not as prominent in the previous novels. La Guma's allusion to the idea of presenting a “total picture” is significant here since it calls to mind Lukacs's concept of totality. The question, however, is: in what ways does La Guma attempt to provide a “total picture” of the South African situation in this work?

One of the ways through which *Time of the Butcherbird* attempts to achieve this is, as Carpenter points out, by offering readers “a typical history of each [ethnic] group, with its thoughts and values” (“The Scene of Representation” 10). There is, for example, a clear attempt in the narrative to depict “from the inside” the attitudes and resistance of the African people of Hlangeni against forced removal. From Kobe the praise singer's reluctance “to [eulogise] this frightened old man” (44), Hlangeni, as well as the approval accorded Mma-Tau for strengthening the resolve of the people to resist, we are made to see Hlangeni the chief, for what he is - namely, “the betrayer” of the people.² Mma-Tau refers to his compromising speech as “[a] song fit to be sung at funerals” (45). The English-speaking white people in the text are represented by Edgar Stopes whose contemptuous attitude towards the Afrikaners and what he sees as “their narrow arrogance” (4) is meant, according to La Guma, to demonstrate “the schism” that exists between

these two groups despite their apparent “unity when it comes to attitudes towards black folk” (“To *Literary Gazette*” 39). It is, nevertheless, in La Guma's portrayal of Afrikaners as represented by Hannes Meulen, amongst others, that the text attempts to achieve its aim of providing a total picture. For unlike Edgar Stopes, who seems to have very little if any significant encounter with Africans, it is the interaction between the Afrikaners and the Africans that constitutes the central thrust of the novel.

As is well known the notion of totality in Lukacs's aesthetics of realism is linked to the concept of typicality. This involves, according to Lukacs, the portrayal of “typical characters in typical situations”. As Kiralyfalvi points out: “In creating the typical the artist embodies in the destinies of certain concrete [people] the most important characteristics of some historical situation that best represent the specific age, nation, and class to which they belong” (*The Aesthetics of Gyorgy Lukacs* 80). In *Time of the Butcherbird* typicality is embodied in Hannes Meulen and Mma-Tau both of whom are clearly shown in the “context of interaction with relevant elements of their social-historical environment” (85). To this end the novel provides extensive biographical information on Hannes Meulen, a bourgeois politician who is “interested in buying a substantial amount of shares” from the prospective mining area (61). We learn of three generations of his family: his grandfather, Oupa Johannes Meulen, a farm owner who was involved in the Boer War (29), his father Christopher Meulen, a political figure and a capitalist who serves as the role model “he had learned to emulate” (57), and Hannes himself an Afrikaner politician trying to grapple with the problems of the 1970s. His father, Christopher Meulen, we are told,

loved the land: to him country was not only a geographical entity, an anthem, celebrations of Dingane's Day, the day of the Blood River. For him country was a matter of who owned the flat, dreary red and yellow plains and the low,

undulating hills, the grass and the water. (57)

Thus although Hannes Meulen's generation is faced with new threats in the 70s such as liberalism which is gaining momentum, blacks' complaints "about money, wages, and rights" (63), and the impending threat of decolonisation in the Portuguese colonies (64), in his concern with capital and politics Hannes takes after his father. (The novel's detailed account of the Meulen family raises curious questions about the possible intertextual connections with Gorky's *The Artamotovs*, a novel that has as its subjects three generations of the Russian bourgeoisie). There is also an attempt to provide details of the Barend family against the background of historical incidents such as the 1922 white miner's strike (30), the Second World War, and the 1946 black miner's strike (32). It appears that Susan Thornton has both these families in mind when he bestows accolades on La Guma for his portraits of white characters who "are as complete, well drawn, and unsentimental as those of blacks..." ("In Pursuit of the State" 34). Chandramohan also comments favourably on the "greater complexity" of La Guma's "pursuit of extra-ethnicity in this novel" (149). In contrast, Maughan-Brown raises some questions about La Guma's somewhat "exhaustive interiorization of the enemy" in this work attributing La Guma's use of representative characters such as Hannes Meulen to "the liberal aesthetic imperative of 'rounded characters' and giving 'the whole picture' " (35). Whether this could be regarded as an indication of La Guma embracing a liberal aesthetic is a moot point. What is important for our purposes is that this "interiorization of the enemy" strengthens rather than weakens typicality in character portrayal in this work in accordance with the demands of realism. La Guma confirms his concern with a realistic portrayal of his characters when he points out that Afrikaners "are people and not machines and in literature they have to be dealt with as humans" ("To *Literary Gazette* 39"). This would seem to explain why Hannes Meulen, for example, comes across to readers as both an

individual (especially in his relationship with his wife which is contrasted with that of Edgar Stopes and Maisie) and a representative of his own generation of Afrikaners. In a similar vein, Mma-Tau emerges as both an individual and a representative of the Hlangeni community, as will be shown later.

It could also be argued that *Time of the Butcherbird* is perhaps indicative of La Guma's attempt to deal imaginatively with the national question in South Africa. This would seem to explain not only La Guma's choice of, in his own words, "characters representative of the South African scene" ("The Real Picture") in this work - a choice that could be seen as being in line with the "multinational" character of South Africa as endorsed by the Freedom Charter - but also in the novel's attempt to show how the national and class struggle intersect in the struggle for land, as will be shown later. Edgar Stopes's question ("Who's running the country, anyway?" 24), although directed to the Afrikaners, is significant in this regard. That La Guma would have attempted to grapple fictionally with the national question does not come as a surprise. *Time of the Butcherbird*, it will be remembered, was published in 1979, just three years after the revival of the national question in the pages of *African Communist*, a debate largely prompted by the advent of Black Consciousness ideology in the late 1960s with its redefinition of a black subjectivity and its emphasis on black unity.³ Although it appears that La Guma did not produce a written submission to this 1976-1977 debate, as a senior member of the party he would have taken part in discussions on this issue at other levels. Whether La Guma succeeds in his attempt to deal with this issue imaginatively in *Time of the Butcherbird* will I hope become clear in the course of the chapter.

Time of the Butcherbird invites a number of possible readings with regard to its realism. Some readers, for example, might opt for a comparative perspective in which the realism of this novel is compared to that of *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*. Read in this way, one could argue that unlike the previous novel in which the focus is predominantly on the forces working towards the future (namely, the workers), *Time of the Butcherbird* revisits, albeit in a different context, the conditions of racial capitalism. The text does not only examine racial animosities and tensions within the rural communities in the Cape but also underscores the fact that these tensions have their underpinnings in the economic system. The fact that the forced removal of the Hlangeni people from their land is primarily motivated by a realisation of the prospects for mining resources in this area is significant in this regard. By emphasizing the conditions of racial capitalism rather than focusing on the forces working towards a different future, one could argue, the text opens itself to be read as being informed by critical realism.

Other readers of the novel could argue that to locate the text within the confines of critical realism is to miss the point somewhat. I have in mind here a critic such as Anthony Chennels, for whom La Guma's "reputation as a socialist novelist" is not only based on *In the Fog* but also includes *Time of the Butcherbird*. According to Chennels, *Time of the Butcherbird* is "a product of socialist consciousness" (39), as can be seen most obviously in Mma-Tau's speech to the Hlangeni people:

The meaning is this: that men are of two kinds, the poor who toil and create the riches of the earth and the rich who do not toil but devour it. The meaning is this: that the people demand their fair share of the fruits of the earth, and their rulers, of whom the white man is a lackey, a servant, refuse them a fair portion. And it is this: that the people insist, the rulers deprive them of work, drive them from their homes, and if they still resist, send their lackeys to shoot them with guns.
(47)

That Mma-Tau "sees whites not as oppressors in their own right but as the lackeys of a larger economic order" is indeed suggestive of a "socialist vision of economic order" (Chennels 48) and, by implication, would seem to provide a socialist perspective to the text. For this reason it is tempting to read the novel as socialist realist.

What is even more suggestive is the way in which the text dramatises the interaction between Mma-Tau and Shilling Murile. For it tips the scales somewhat in favour of a reading that regards the text as socialist realist. Such a reading would take as its point of departure the premise that there exists yet further evidence of the intertextual connections between La Guma's novels and Gorky's *Mother*. But, in this case, the (Nilovna/Pavel Disciple/Mentor) relationship depicted in *Mother* is inverted, for it is Mma-Tau rather than Shilling Murile who might be seen as assuming the role of political mentor. This can be seen most clearly in the text's attempt to employ the "spontaneity/consciousness dialectic" in the portrayal of these characters. Read in this way, Murile's quest for revenge is an act of spontaneity because it is not based on political guidance but on the pursuit of personal interest. The first time we encounter Murile, who has just been released from jail, he tells us that he is "finished with white people" and attempts to provide a political justification for his intentions: "There were people in that place [i.e. in jail] who had also been put there by the white men and who said that we should fight on. I used to listen to them talking" (19). This in a way recalls the "rooker's" political influence on Charlie in *And A Threefold Cord* and it is tempting to see it in this light. But Murile is insistent that this is personal: "What I have to do I shall do on my own" (20), a clear indication that his intentions are devoid of any political justification.

Mma-Tau attempts to persuade Murile to redirect his anger towards the collective political purpose of the Hlangeni people:

It is not for me to stand in your way if you wish to collect your debt, but hear this. A whole people is starting to think of collecting a collective debt, the time of this debt is drawing on. All over the country people are feeling it... In relation to that, your debt, though important to you, becomes of small significance.... (80)

Annie Gagiano is certainly right in her argument that "to Mma-Tau Murile is someone who may become useful if he subsumes his project under the much larger struggle to come" (61). Murile, however, seems to be bent on personalising the situation as can be seen in his response to Mma-Tau's plea: "I have no need of people. This is my thing and afterwards I'll go my way" (80). The self-centredness of Murile's motivation is, ultimately, borne out in the fact that despite Mma-Tau's attempt to give him a political sense of direction he, nevertheless, collects his debt by killing not only Hans Meulen but also Edgar Stopes. While it is true that Edgar Stopes could "by virtue of his skin [be] presumed a benefactor of the system" (Msosa 98), Murile's understanding of this "system" cannot be over-emphasized. William Carpenter puts it succinctly: "Murile kills Stopes [simply] because he is also white" ("The Scene of Representation in Alex La Guma's Later Novels" 14). Against this background, then, Murile's killing of Stopes is "anarchic", providing further evidence of the spontaneity of his actions. Such a reading would, however, eventually, regard Murile's somewhat doubtful identification with his "people" (118) at the end of the novel as suggestive of his shift from spontaneity to consciousness, however embryonic in form. For example, although Balutansky does not necessarily contextualize the novel in terms of the "spontaneity/consciousness dialectic"; it is implied in her argument that Murile "ceases to be a self-minded individual" (115) and, ultimately, "reaches a level of consciousness that responds to the oppression of all Africans" (117). According to this reading, then, like *In the Fog of the*

Seasons' End, *Time of the Butcherbird* moves towards socialist realism.

There are, nevertheless, some problems with this interpretation. Firstly, La Guma's attempt to adopt a socialist realist perspective, as demonstrated in Mma-Tau's subtle articulation of the people's aspiration towards an equitable distribution of wealth (47), is marred by ideological contradictions within the text itself. The genuine attempt to use the "spontaneity/consciousness dialectic" by way of exploring the interaction between Shilling Murile and Mma-Tau is undermined by an analysis that underscores social contradictions in terms of cultural nationalism. Mma-Tau's socialist rhetoric is, for example, undercut by a perception of the struggle that defines "us" and "them" essentially in terms of racial categories, as can be seen most obviously when she attempts to recruit Murile on the basis of his "hatred of them" (83). This renders somewhat problematic the contention that Mma-Tau "demonstrates an acute class consciousness" (Sougou 48). The result, as Carpenter correctly observes, is that Mma-Tau "presents a possibility that the ethos of racism will be turned against whites instead of transcended in a non-racial universalism" ("The Scene of Representation" 12). This problem is further compounded by what Gagliano has identified as "the virtual absence from (the text) of any instances of cross-racial solidarity", an omission that leads this critic to suggest that the novel "in a sense replicates the apartheid it opposes" (64). This is the most glaring contradiction in La Guma's text, a contradiction that provides evidence that, unlike La Guma's other work in which the ideology of the text is consistent with the author's ideological position, *Time of the Butcherbird* departs from this trend. But then as Francis Mulhern reminds us in his provocative essay, "Ideology and Literary Form - a comment", a "literary text need *not* ... coincide with the positions formally maintained by its author" (85) (emphasis in the original). For this reason, while I share with Maughan-Brown the idea that textual ideology in this work is inconsistent with authorial ideology,

I do not, however, entertain the conception that this should be seen as an “anomaly”.

Secondly, such a reading would seem to accord Murile the role of a positive hero, thereby rendering the ending of the novel unproblematic. Indeed some critics have accorded Murile this role without necessarily suggesting that this novel is socialist realist. I have in mind here Maughan-Brown's ideological reading of this work. Comparing *Time of the Butcherbird* to La Guma's earlier novels Maughan-Brown points out that his intention is to show that this work differs from the others "in its political and potential ideological effects" (19). Accordingly he begins his analysis with an examination of the author's intention in writing this novel and this leads him to La Guma's explanation of the title of the novel in his interview with Cecil Abrahams:

The title of the novel comes from African folklore. One of the riddles from the oral tradition indicates that the butcherbird represents something which not only cleanses the cattle but also cleanses the society. It does away with the wizards, the sorcerers, and the people who have a negative effect on the society. What I'm trying to say is that conscious resistance of the people heralds the time when the butcherbird will cleanse South Africa of racism, oppression and so on. (*Alex La Guma* 118)

Maughan-Brown then goes on to argue that both the choice of the title and the explanation that La Guma provides "give primacy" to Murile's private revenge rather than to a collective programme of political resistance which Mma-Tau advocates. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that his reading of the novel leads him to conclude that in the "acute tension" that exists in the novel between "the sponsorship of collective political action ... and a celebration of individual reaction" ("Adjusting the Focal Length" 25-26) it is the latter that the novel endorses. His claim that there is "a contradiction between the political position La Guma maintained outside his fiction, and in the majority of his novels, and that apparently endorsed in *Time of the Butcherbird*"

(29) is thus a logical conclusion to this argument. Maughan-Brown's reading of the novel is both perceptive and thought-provoking; however, by assigning Murile the role of the butcherbird, he (perhaps unwittingly) implies that he is meant to serve as a positive hero and, in this way, seems to be imposing a resolution to the very (unresolved) contradictions he identifies in the text. The truth of the matter is that by killing Stopes and Hannes Meulen, Murile assigns *himself* the role of the butcherbird - a role that La Guma in fact assigns to a collective "conscious resistance of the people", an idea that is articulated by Mma-Tau in her invitation to Murile to be involved in the people's collective debt (80) and endorsed by Madonele (117) in the text: "Then you must join us, the villagers, and be lost among us" (117).

It is not, however, Murile who is meant to serve as a positive hero in the novel, for unlike Tekwane in *In the Fog*, he does not represent any moral and political virtues. Murile's role as a positive hero is further undermined by his refusal to "tame personal feelings under the guidance of his [mentor]" Mma-Tau (Hoskings 13). If anyone, it is Mma-Tau who assumes this role. As an individual Mma-Tau is depicted as an adamant character who always wants to "have her way" (49) but the Hlangeni people look up to her not only for political guidance but because of her other role as a community worker - as a qualified nurse she plays the role of midwife to women in labour in this rural community (83). Mma-Tau stands out in her community not only because of her insistence on her democratic right to participate in the decision-making process of the community ("Is this not a meeting of the village? I shall speak" (45)) but also because of her understanding of the dynamics of racial capitalism. In some of her utterances, Mma-Tau, at times, serves as La Guma's ideological mouthpiece, as can be seen in her socialist rhetoric, which is couched in the terminology of the SACP's definition of the South African situation as "colonialism of a special type" (47), as well as in her argument that a collective programme of

political action will solve social problems. As a political veteran whose experience as an activist includes her participation in the 1956 women's demonstration (81) she gains the ideological assent of members of the community in her speeches ('Hauw! The she-lion has roared,' says Kobe in approval (47)) which give them a sense of direction, strengthening their resolve to resist the forced removal, and eventually she takes the lead in "bringing the village people into the hills" (118). It is to this communal programme of political resistance that Murile is being invited.

A strict adherence to the "spontaneity/consciousness dialectic" paradigm would require Murile to gradually move away from his self-centred concerns, demonstrate a development of his political consciousness and his unequivocal endorsement of and participation in this communal programme of political resistance. In the case of *Time of the Butcherbird* it is difficult to say with certainty whether Murile really joins the communal struggle of the Hlangeni people in the end and, if he does, whether he joins it for political reasons - the "we" at the end of the novel remains ambiguous.⁴ When Madonele asks, 'You said *we*. Are you coming with our people?', Murile's response is, 'Let us say I am coming with *you*, old man.... Remember you have my tobacco' (118). The result is that "spontaneity" and "consciousness" are never really "synthesized" (Hosking 15). It is perhaps not a coincidence that we ultimately have a conclusion in which nothing is really concluded about Murile's fate. Whether this open-endedness of the text is the product of La Guma's conscious intention or essentially the objective ideological function of the text is, nevertheless, a moot point. Murile's unresolved fate which would have completed the "spontaneity/consciousness dialectic", nevertheless, leads to the possible conclusion that despite the text's gesture towards socialist realism as seen partly in Mma-Tau's socialist rhetoric and intimations towards the "spontaneity/consciousness dialectic" in the dialogic interaction between Mma-Tau and Murile, the text remains, in Lukacs's terms, critical realist since it does not "reject

socialism out of hand” (*Realism in Our Time* 107).

In conclusion, one could argue that although the following statement was made in 1985, six years after the publication of *Time of the Butcherbird*, La Guma might have had this novel in mind when he commented:

Progressive literature from South Africa...must transcend the group divisions which apartheid tries to force upon society via separate development. Bantu education, bantustans, and the like. Literature should be able to examine our society as a whole. In short, by doing so, writing to-day will contribute to the founding of the nation of the future. (Gala, “Is there a South African National Culture?” 42)

In the previous chapter I employed Lukacs in raising the question of the need to reflect the national context(s) of class struggle in socialist realist literature and pointed out how La Guma takes cognisance of this aspect in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*. The problem in the case of *Time of the Butcherbird*, however, is that, in La Guma's pursuit of interracial representation, this project is pushed too far to the point where the basic premise is no longer consistent or even coherent ideologically. The silence on the possibilities for a demonstration of interracial solidarity in the text is a case in point. It should, nevertheless, be pointed out that the implicit attempt to find a fictional form in which to get to grips with the national question is, nonetheless, significant even if it does not entirely succeed.

NOTES

1. See Louis Tremaine, Balutansky, Abrahams, Brian Wafawarowa, Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo and, to a certain extent, Annie Gagiano.
2. Hlangeni's betrayal of his community reminds one of "the headman of the village, a servile man and a betrayer" (70) in La Guma's only short story that has a rural setting, "The Exile", which takes as its subject the peasants' revolt of the late 1950s in the Transkei. For more on this revolt see Govan Mbeki's *The Peasant's Revolt*.
3. For the earlier debates (1954 and 1958/59) see Forman and Odendaal (171-189). For the 1976-77 debates see copies of *African Communist* of the same dates - Joe Ngwenya's article is particularly interesting since in its ambiguities it shows the complexity of dealing with the national question. One also wonders about the coincidental publication of *Time of the Butcherbird* and No Sizwe's *One Azania, One Nation* which deals with the national question. See No Sizwe's Chapter 5 in particular which critically deals with the 1976-77 debates.
4. Despite her attentiveness to other "ambivalences... ambiguities .. and uncertainties in La Guma text", Gagiano reads this aspect of the text unproblematically. She reads the end of the novel as implying that "Murile is now joining the villager's communal cause" (63) (Emphasis in the original).

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

I have written books about the beginning of the idea of national liberation. I've tried to show the growth of the resistance movement in South Africa in the face of incredible obstacles, telling blows and bitter setbacks. I have always wanted to watch the transformation of unassuming seemingly ordinary people into staunch fighters against the racist regime, for the freedom and equality of the Black population. And I suppose these are the main themes in my work. ("My books have gone back home" 72)

This statement made by La Guma in a 1984 interview, just a year before his death, epitomizes the central thrust of this author's oeuvre. Indeed the progressive development in La Guma's novels would seem to demonstrate a conscious attempt on La Guma's part to strive for a totality of representation of the South African experience during the period under consideration (namely, from the late 1950s to the late 1970s) and, thereby, confirm La Guma's role as a social historian.

La Guma's role as a social historian, nevertheless, needs some qualification for he does not really provide us with documentary narratives of particular historical events (as Lauretta Ngcobo, for example, does in her two novels *Cross of Gold* and *And They Didn't Die*) nor do his novels taken together really provide a chronological account of historical reality in South Africa during that period. Chandramohan has correctly observed that there is always "a disjunction between the historical period in which [La Guma] writes and the historical period he writes about", citing the fact that La Guma's first novels published in 1962 and 1964 are remarkably silent on the Sharpeville massacre and the intense repression that followed and that *The Stone Country*, published in 1967, refers only fleetingly to the Emergency (26).¹ He shares with Gerald Moore

the idea that *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* “[bridges] the disjunction between La Guma's fiction” (136) and his “long-held position as an uncompromising revolutionary” (Moore 114). According to Chandramohan, *Time of the Butcherbird* “represents [La Guma's] literary and political response to the changes in the social and literary scene in South Africa in the 1970s” (26). Significantly, Chandramohan attributes “the disjunction between the chronology in [La Guma's] fictional world and that of the real” to the author’s attempt to achieve “a thematic unity in his works” which was given priority “over the attraction of being topical” (136).

I share with Chandramohan the idea that La Guma privileges thematic unity over topicality. I would, however, also add that La Guma's avoidance of topicality (at least) in the case of *A Walk in the Night*, *And A Threefold Cord* and *The Stone Country* might have had a lot to do with the transition in his writing from journalism to fiction.² Having established himself as a creative writer rather than just a documenter of fact La Guma then deals with more explicitly locatable historical issues in *In the Fog* and *Time of the Butcherbird*.

An overall picture of La Guma's novels attests to his consummate skill as a craftsman. Chandramohan has chosen to see La Guma's craftsmanship in terms of the gradual shift from “ethnicity” in the early novels (because of their apparent focus on the Coloured communities) to “trans-ethnicity”. Most critics have, however, identified the progressive development in La Guma's novels in terms of the political consciousness of the protagonists in each novel. Kenneth Parker sums up the development in these words:

[La Guma] delineates a trajectory which begins with the alienated and individualistic scavenger, Michael Adonis [*A Walk in the Night*], imbues him with an embryonic class consciousness as old Pauls in his dealings with the White

garage owner Mostert [*And A Threefold Cord*], and transmutes him into the political prisoner, George Adams, who can radicalise the thugs in the prison into the realisation of their common enemy and of the advantage of social action [*The Stone Country*] so that by the time he writes the more obviously “political” novels, La Guma can portray with some considerable skill, how “ordinary” people have moved from militant but non-violent struggle to guerilla war: Elias Tekwane, who is tortured to death; Beukes, who joins the underground resistance [*In the Fog of the Seasons’ End*]; the whole community, under the leadership of the sister of the local chief, who resist the might of the state [*Time of the Butcherbird*].... (“Alex’s Walk to Freedom” 9-10)

In this study I have looked at this progressive development as indicative of a gradual shift in La Guma's work from critical realism in the early novels to a distinct element of socialist realism in his later novels. This shift in La Guma's oeuvre, I have tried to argue, is underpinned by “the spontaneity/consciousness dialectic” that begins with Michael Adonis’s anarchic killing of innocent Doughty to the embryonic class consciousness of Charlie Pauls to George Adams’s use of his political consciousness to provide a sense of direction to fellow inmates and, ultimately, actions that are based on a profound political understanding in the case of Beukes and Tekwane. In *Time of the Butcherbird* this paradigm seems to be employed for the purposes of “probing a grey area between spontaneity and consciousness” on the part of Shilling Murile, resulting in an open-ended text. According to Parker, La Guma's unfinished novel, *Crowns of Battle* “has, as its theme, the armed struggle of the military wing of the ANC, Umkhonto wesizwe... against the South African State” (“Alex’s Walk to Freedom” 9).

If Parker’s assertion is anything to go by, then, one would argue that La Guma's oeuvre somewhat follows the contours of the unfolding of the political struggle in South Africa. This of course raises questions about where *Time of the Butcherbird* fits in to this scheme. In my view the “broad historical sweep” in *Time of the Butcherbird* is meant to indicate La Guma's contextualization of the unfolding of the struggle in the countryside over a long period of time

within a single text and thereby, present part of a total picture that is not covered in previous novels which are predominantly urban in orientation. In this sense *Time of the Butcherbird* should not be seen as indicative of a regression “[in] terms of a chronology of resistance” (Maughan-Brown 27); instead, in relation to other novels, it should be seen as a reflection of the uneven development of resistance in urban areas and the countryside that has characterised the South African struggle. All in all, La Guma's achievement in his longer fiction lies in the fact that he goes some way towards the creation of a South African proletarian literature.

In most of his essays and interviews La Guma persistently reiterated his belief that the situation in South Africa was bound to change and that he would, hopefully, be part of a “post-apartheid” South Africa. Regrettably, he died before his hopes could be fulfilled. I, however, want to end this discussion with the concluding comments from La Guma's last published article in which he sums up his “post-apartheid” vision:

Can we not look into the future and see the barriers fallen away under the hammer-blows of progress as our people, having emerged victorious over racist tyranny, national oppression, ethnic or community divisions, commence to build a new life? Can we not dare to bring within the boundaries of our community Marx's and Engels's even longer-term view of the world of the future?.... Flourishing under the warm sun of the equality of all peoples, our culture, art and literature will intermingle as our liberated peoples will do, blossoming into a South African culture; we shall then read a South African literature, not what is described today as merely literature ‘from’ South Africa or ‘South African Writing’. (Gala, “Is there a South African National Culture?” 42)

This is striking, suggesting how much La Guma was not only a socialist but also a nationalist. South Africa is now a non-racial democratic country; the question of whether we can now talk of a “South African literature” is, however, a moot point.

NOTES

1. This “disjunction” seems to be a crucial factor in Parker’s interrogation of Coetzee’s first essay on La Guma (“J.M. Coetzee: the Postmodern and Postcolonial”).
2. In an attempt to indicate his concern about a possible conflation of these two genres La Guma is quoted as having pointed out in his discussion of *The Stone Country* in a BBC radio broadcast in 1968:

Reportage might bore the reader. Experience in journalism gives one the discipline to organise the material, but it might have bad effects when it comes to creative writing.

See Chandramohan (77).

WORKS CITED

PRIMARY SOURCES

- Adams, Arnold. [Alex La Guma]. "Why I Joined the Communist Party." *African Communist*. 47 (1971) : 57-61.
- Gala [Alex La Guma]. "Against Literary Apartheid." *African Communist* 58 (1974) : 99-107.
- "Doing Something Useful." *African Communist* 89 (1982) : 49-52.
- "Hello or Goodbye, Athol Fugard." *African Communist* 57 (1974) : 100-105.
- "Has Art Failed South Africa?" *African Communist* 100 (1985):38-43.
- "Is there a South African National Culture?" *African Communist* 100 (1985) : 38-43.
- La Guma, Alex. "Address by Lotus Award Winner." *Lotus : Afro-Asian Writings* 10 (1971) : 195-197.
- "African Culture and National Liberation." *Journal of the New African Literature and the Arts* 3 (1973) : 57-59.

- La Guma, Alex. "Alex La Guma." Interview with Robert Serumaga. *African Writers Talking*.
Ed. D. Duerden and C. Pieterse. London : Heineman, 1972.
- "Alexander Solzhenitsyn : 'Life through a crooked eye'." *African Communist*
56 (1974) : 69 - 79.
- "Along Came a Spider..." : School Feeding Scheme Stopped." *New Age* 1
May 1958 : 7.
- *And A Threefold Cord*. London : Kliptown Books, 1988.
- ed, *Apartheid : A Collection of Writings on South African Racism by South
Africans*. London:Lawrence and Wishart, 1972.
- "At the Portagees." *A Walk in the Night and Other Stories*. London :
Heinemann, 1967. 108-113.
- "The Dead-End Kids of Hanover Street." *Liberation Chabalala : The World
of Alex La Guma*. Eds. Andre Odendaal and Roger Field. Bellville : Mayibuye
Books, 1993. 9-10.
- "Cape Town Trade Union Activity is at a low ebb." *New Age* 19 December
1957 : 5.

La Guma, Alex. "Coffee for the Road." *Lotus : Afro-Asian Writings* 9.3 (1971) : 114-122.

-----, "Culture and Liberation." *Sechaba* 10. 4(1976) : 50-58.

-----, "The Exile." *Lotus : Afro-Asian Writings* 11. 1 (1972) : 68-72.

-----, *In the Fog of Season's End*. London : Heinemann, 1972.

-----, "Jimmy La Guma: A biography." ms. commissioned by the James La Guma Memorial Committee, nd.

-----, "Law of the Jungle." *Liberation Chabalala : The Writings of Alex La Guma*.

Eds. Andre Odendaal and Roger Field. Bellville : Mayibuye Books, 1993. 17-19.

-----, *Liberation Chabalala : The Writings of Alex La Guma*. Eds. Andre Odendaal and Roger Field. Bellville : Mayibuye Books, 1993.

-----, "Literature and Life." *Lotus : Afro-Asian Writings* 1. 4(1970) : 237-239.

-----, "The Man in the Tree." *The Literary Review* 15. 1(1971) : 19-30.

-----, "My Books have gone back home." *World Marxist Review*. 27.5 (1984) : 71-

73.

La Guma, Alex. "Non-European Audience Hears Emilyn Williams." *New Age* 24 Jan. 1957:

6.

----- "On a Wedding." *Memories of Home : The Writings of Alex La Guma*. Ed. Cecil Abrahams. New Jersey : Africa World Press. 1991. 81-95.

----- "Out of Darkness." *Quartet : Four Voices from South Africa*. London : Heinemann. 1959. 33-38.

----- "Pampoen-Onder-die Bos." *Liberation Chabalala : The World of Alex La Guma*. Eds. Andre Odendaal and Roger Field. Bellville : Mayibuye Books, 1993. 213-223.

----- "Paul Robeson and Africa." *African Communist* 46 (1971): 113-119.

----- "A Pick and a Shovel." *New Age* 30 Aug. 1956:3.

----- "The Picture in the Parlour." *Liberation Chabalala : The World of Alex La Guma* Eds. Andre Odendaal and Roger Field. Bellville : Mayhibuye Books, 1993. 167-169.

La Guma, Alex. *25 Proud Years : The Story of the Textile Worker's Union*. Cape Town :
Textile Workers' Industrial Union, 1959

-----“The Real Picture.” *Memories of Home : The Writings of Alex La Guma*. Ed.
Cecil Abrahams. New Jersey : Africa World Press, 1991. 15-29.

-----“South African Writing Under Apartheid.” *Lotus : Afro-Asian Writings* 23.
1 (1975) : 11-21.

-----*A Soviet Journey*. Moscow : Progress Publishers 1978.

-----“State of Emergency.” *Liberation Chabalala : The World of Alex La Guma*.
Eds. Andre Odendaal and Roger Field. Bellville : Mayibuye Books, 1993. 146-148.

-----*The Stone Country*. London : Heinemann, 1967.

-----“Ten Days in Roeland Street Jail.” *Liberation Chabalala : The World of Alex
La Guma*. Eds. Andre Odendaal and Roger Field. Bellville : Mayibuye Books, 1993. 14-
16.

-----*Time of the Butcherbird*. London : Heinemann, 1979.

-----“To Literary Gazette.” *Memories of Home : The Writings of Alex La Guma*.

Ed. Cecil Abrahams. New Jersey : Africa World Press, 1991.

----- La Guma, Alex. "What I Learned From Maxim Gorky." *Lotus : Afro-Asian Writings* 34.4(1977) : 164-168.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Abrahams, Cecil. *Alex La Guma*. Boston : Twayne, 1985.

----- "Alex La Guma." *Dictionary of Literary Bibliography* 117.

Eds. Bernth Lindfors and L. Dander. Detroit, London : Gale Research, 1992. 211-227.

Alas, Leopoldo. "What Naturalism is not." *Realism in Modern Literature*. Ed. Becker George J. Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1963. 266 - 273.

"Amakomanisi : The South African Communist Party 1921-1986." (Videotape). Cape Town: Inkululeko Films, 1985.

"Answers to our questionnaire." *Soviet Literature*. 11.356 (1977) : 111-134.

Arab, A. *Politics and the novel in Africa*. Algiers : Office des Publications Universitaires, 1982.

Arvon, Henri. *Marxist Aesthetics*. Ithaca and London : 1973.

Asein, Samuel Omo. *Alex La Guma : The Man and His Work*. Ibadan : New Horn, Heinemann, 1987.

Astrachan, Anthony M. "The Names are Fictitious." Review of *A Walk in the Night*. *Black Orpheus* 14 (1964) : 59.

- Attwell, David. *J.M. Coetzee : South Africa and the Politics of Writing*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford, Cape Town, Johannesburg : University of California Press, David Phillip, 1993.
- Balutansky, Kathleen. *The Novels of Alex La Guma : The Representation of a Political Conflict*. Washington : Three Continents Press, 1990.
- Barrat, Andrew. *The Early Fiction of Maksim Gorky : Six Essays in Interpretation*. Nottingham: Astra Press, 1993.
- Becker, George J. *Realism in Modern Literature*. Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1963.
- Bennet, Bruce. "Literature and Journalism : The Fiction of Robert Drewe." *Ariel* 20.3 (1989). 3-16.
- Biko, Steve. *I Write What I Like: a selection of his writings*. Ed Adred Stubbs. London : Heinemann, 1987.
- Bisztray, George. *Marxist Models of Literary Realism*. New York : Columbia University Press, 1978.
- Bloch, Ernst, Lukacs G. et al. *Aesthetics and Politics*. London : Verso, 1977.
- Bunting, Brian. *Moses Kotane : South African Revolutionary*. London : Inkululeko Publications 1975.

Bunting, Brian. Personal Interview. Cape Town 25 March 1994.

----- South African Communists Speak: Documents from the History of the South African Communist Party 1915-1980. London: Inkululeko Publications, 1981.

----- "South African Journalists in the Frontline." *Sechaba* 23. 4 (1989) : 8 - 15.

Bunting, Sonia. Telephone Conversation. 31 August 1994.

Burger, Peter. *The Decline of Modernism*. Cambridge : Policy Press, 1992.

Carpenter, William. "The Scene of Representation in Alex La Guma's Later Novels." *English in Africa* 18. 8 (1991). 1-18.

----- "Ovals, Spheres, Ellipses, and Sundry Bulges" : Alex La Guma Imagines the Human Body." *Research in African Literatures*. 22. 4 (1991). 79-98.

Cartey, Wilfred. *Whispers from a Continent*. London, Nairobi, Ibadan : Heinemann, 1969.

Chambers, Ross. "Alter ego : intertextuality, irony and the politics of reading."

Intertextuality: theories and practices. Eds. Michael Worton and Judith Still. Manchester and New York : Manchester University Press, 1990. 143-158.

Chandramohan, Balasubramanyam. *A Study in Trans-Ethnicity in Modern South Africa : the*

Writings of Alex La Guma . New York : Mellen, 1992.

Chennels, Anthony. "Pastoral and Anti-Pastoral Elements in Alex La Guma's Later Novels."

Ed. Emmanuel Ngaru. *Literature, Language and the Nation*. Harare : Baobab, 1989.
39-49.

Clarke, Katerina. *The Soviet Novel : History as Ritual*. Chicago and London : University of
Chicago Press. 1981.

Chapman, Michael. *The Drum Decade : Stories from the 1950s*. Pietermaritzburg. University
of Natal Press, 1979.

Coetzee, J.M. "Alex La Guma and the Responsibilities of the South African Writers. *Journal
of the New African Literature and the Arts*. 9-10 (1971) : 5-11.

-----"Man's Fate in the Novels of Alex La Guma." *Doubling the Point : Essays
and Interviews*. Ed. David Attwell. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London : Harvard
University Press, 1992. 344-360.

Comrade Mzala [Jabulani Nxumalo]. "Culture, The Artist and Liberation." *African Communist*
104 (1986) : 71 - 72.

Cornwell, Gareth. "And a Threefold Cord : La Guma's Neglected Masterpiece?" Paper

Presented at the Alex La Guma colloquim : Alex La Guma : journalism, writing and the representation of race and place. University of Western Cape, 5 December 1995.

-----.. "Protest in Fiction : An Approach to Alex La Guma." Unpublished M.A. thesis. Rhodes University, 1979.

Cowley, Malcolm. "A Natural History of American Naturalism." *Realism in Modern Literature*.

Ed. Becker, George, J. Princeton, Princeton UP, 1963. 429-464.

Davidson, Apollon. Personal Interview. Cape Town. 25 March 1994.

Dialego. "What is Trotskyism?" *African Communist*. 115 (1988) : 69-78.

Ezeigbo, Theodora, Akachi. "A Sign of the Times : Alex La Guma's *Time of the Butcherbird*."

Literary Half-Yearly 32. 1 (1991) : 100 - 114.

Feinberg, Barry. Personal Interview. Cape Town. 24 March 1994

Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. *From Fact to Fiction : Journalism and Imaginative Writing in America*.

Baltimore and London : The John Hopkins University Press, 1985.

Forman, Lionel. *A Trumpet from the Housetops : The Selected Writings of Lionel Forman*. Eds. Sadie Forman and Andre Odendaal. Claremont : David Phillip; London: Zed; Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992.

Freeborn, Richard. *The Russian Revolutionary Novel : Turgenev to Pasternak*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Frow, John. "Intertextuality and Ontology." *Intertextuality : theories and practices*. Eds. Michael Worton and Judith Still. Manchester and New York : Manchester University, 1990. 45-55.

Furst, Lilian, R. *Through the Lens of the Reader: Explorations of European Narrative*. New York : State University of New York, 1992.

Gagiano, Annie. " "The tree goes on" : Reconsidering Alex La Guma's *Time of the Butcherbird*." *English in Africa*. 24. 1(1997) : 59-69.

"A Great Gap in your Life." *Fighting Talk* August 1962.1

Gikandi, Simon. *Reading the African Novel*. London. James Currey, 1987.

Gordimer, Nadine. *The Black Interpreters - Notes on African Writing*. Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1973.

Gorky, Maxim. *The Artamotovs*. Moscow : Progress Publishers, n.d.

-----, "The aims of our journal." *On Literature*. Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1982.
269-280.

-----, *The Collected Short Stories of Maxim Gorky*. Eds. Avram Yarmolinsky and
Baroness Moure Budberg. New Jersey : Citadel Press, 1988.

-----, "How I Learnt to Write." *On Literature*. Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1982.
29-67.

-----, *Mother*. New Jersey : Citadel Press, 1988.

-----, "A Talk with Young Writers." *On Literature*. Moscow : Progress Publishers,
1988. 295-306.

-----, "Vsemirnaya Literatura (World Literature)." *On Literature*. Moscow :
Progress Publishers, 1988. 153-161.

Graeme, Addison, "Drum Beat : An Examination of *Drum*." July/August 1978 : 5-9.

Grant, Jane. "Literature of Exile : A Comparative Study of Writers from the West Indies and
South Africa." *Southern African Research In Progress : Collected Papers 3*. Paper read
at the Centre for Southern African Studies, University of York, 1978. 30-50.

- Green, Robert. "Alex La Guma's *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* : The Politics of Subversion." *Umoja* 3 (1979) : 85-93.
- Haarhof, Dorian. *The wild West : Frontier Myths and Metaphors in Literature set in Namibia 1760 - 1988*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 1991.
- Haugh, Richard. *The Philosophical Foundations of Solzhenitsyn's vision of Art*. Alexandr Solzenitsyn: Critical Essays and Documentary Materials. New York : Collier Books; London : Collier Macmillan, 1975. 168,184.
- Hellman, John. *Fables of Fact : the new journalism as new fiction*. Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 1981.
- Hingley, Ronald. *Russian Writers and Soviet Society 1917 - 1978*. London : Methuen, 1979.
- Hollowel, John. *Fact and Fiction : The New Journalism and the nonfiction novel*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977.
- Hosking, Geoffrey. *Beyond Socialist Realism : Soviet Fiction since Ivan Denisovich*. London Toronto, Sydney, New York : 1980.
- Jameson, Frederic. *Marxism and Form : Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*. Princeton, New Jersey : Princeton University Press, 1971.

Johnson, Pauline. *Marxist Aesthetics : The foundations within everyday life for an emancipated consciousness*. London. Routledge Kegan Paul, 1984.

JanMohamed, Abdul R. *Manichean Aesthetics : The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa*. Amherst : The University of Massachusetts Press, 1983.

Kibera, Leonard. "A critical Appreciation of Alex La Guma's *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*." *Busara* 8 (1976) : 59-66.

Kiralyfalvi, B. *The aesthetics of Gyorgy Lukacs*. New Jersey : Princeton University press, 1975.

Klima, Vladimir et al. *Black Africa : Literature and Language*. Prague : Czechoslovakian Academy of Sciences, 1976.

-----*South African Prose Writing in English*. Prague : Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, 1971.

Kondratovich, Alexei. "Writers in the Struggle for Peace." *Soviet Literature* 7.352 (1977) : 159-173.

La Guma, Blanche. "Alex La Guma : A Wife's Memory." *Memories of Home : The Writings of Alex La Guma*. Ed. Cecil Abrahams. New Jersey : Africa World Press, 1991.

----- Letter to the author, 10 March 1994.

Lenin, Vladimir. *Selected Writings* 1. Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1961.

Lewis, Gavin. *Between the Wire and the Wall*. Cape Town : David Phillip, 1987.

Lindfors, Bernth. "Contradictory and Complementary Strategies of Protest in Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night*." *Comparative Approaches to African Literature*. Atlanta : Redop, 1994. 45-52.

----- . "Form and Technique in the Novels of Richard Rive and Alex La Guma." *Journal of the New African Literature and the Arts* 2(1966) : 10-15.

----- . "Robin Hood Realism in South African Fiction." *Africa Today* 15.4(1968): 16-18.

London, Jack. *Novels and Social Writings*. New York : Literary Classics of the United States, 1982.

Loomis, Roger Sherman. "A Defence of Naturalism." *Realism in Modern Literature*. Ed. Becker G.J. Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1963. 535-548.

Lukacs, Georg. *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*. London : Merlin Press, 1963.

----- . *Realism in Our Time*. New York, Evanston, San Fransisco, London : Harper and Row, 1971.

Lukacs, George. *Studies in European Realism : A Sociological Survey of the writings of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, Tolstoy, Gorki and others* trans. Edith Bone. London : Merlin Press, 1972.

----- . *The Writer and the Critic*. London : Merlin Press, 19

Lunn, Eugene. *Marxism and Modernism*. Berkeley : University of California Press, 1982.

Maqagi, Vuyiswa. "La Guma's Commitment to Social Change in South Africa." Unpublished M.A. Thesis. University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1981.

Maughan-Brown, David, "Adjusting the Focal Length : Alex La Guma and Exile." *English in Africa* 18.2 (1991) : 19-38.

Matthews, James. Personal Interview 25 March 1994.

Mbeki, Govan. *South Africa : The Peasants' Revolt*. England : Penguin, 1964.

Meli Francis. *A History of the ANC : South Africa belongs to us*. Harare : Zimbabwe Publishing House; Bloomington : Indiana University Press; London : Currey, 1989.

Mnthali, Felix. "Common Grounds in the Literatures of Black America and Southern Africa." *American Studies in Africa*. Eds. Andrew Horn and George E. Carter. Roma : University of Lesotho and the Ford Foundation, 1984. 39-54.

- Moore, Gerald. "Through Suffering to Resistance." *Twelve African Writers*. Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1980. 105-120.
- Mphahlele, Ezekiel. "Tribute to Alex La Guma." *Sechaba* 5. 2(1971) : 9.
- Msoa, Watson. "Marxist Vision in La Guma's Time of the Butcherbird." *Outlook* 1 (1984) : 87-103.
- Mulhern, Francis. "Ideology and Literary Form - a comment." *New Left Review* 91 (1975) : 80-87.
- Mzamane, Mbulelo and Tadi, Yerima. "Alex La Guma : Martyr of the South African Struggle." *Review of English and Literary Studies* 3.1(1986) : 4-13.
- Mzamane, Mbulelo. "Sharpeville and its Aftermath : The Novels of Richard Rive, Peter Abrahams, Alex La Guma, and Laurretta Ngcobo." *Ariel* 6. 2 (1985) : 31-44.
- Naude, Henry. "A Straight Talk To Coloured Teenagers." *New Age* 27 June 1957 : 6.
- Ndebele, Njabulo. "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary : Some new writings in South Africa." *Rediscovery of the Ordinary : Essays in South African Literature and Culture*. Johannesburg : Cosaw, 1991. 37-57.

Ndebele, Njabulo. "Turkish Tales and Some Thoughts on South African Fiction." *Rediscovery of the Ordinary : Essays in South African Literature and Culture*. Johannesburg : Cosaw, 1991. 11-36.

Ngcobo Laurretta. *And They Didn't Die*. Braamfontein : Skotaville, 1990.

----- . *Cross of Gold*. London : Longman, 1981.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *A Grain of Wheat*. London : Heinemann. 1967.

Ngwenya, Joe. "A Further Contribution to the National Question." *African Communist* 67 (1976) : 48-59.

Nkosi Lewis. "Alex La Guma : The Man and His Work." *The Transplanted Heart : Essays on South Africa*. Benin City (Nigeria) : Ethiope Publishing Corporation, 1975. 107-115.

----- . "Fiction by Black South Africans : Richard Rive, Bloke Modisane, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Alex La Guma." *Introduction to African Literature : An Anthology of Critical Writing*. Ed. Ulli Beier. London : Longman, 1979. 221-227.

----- . "Resistance and the Crisis of Representation." Second Conference on South African Literature, Evangelische Akademie, Bad Boll, West Germany, 11-13 Dec. 1987. *Dokumente Texte and Tendenzen : South African Literature : From Popular Culture to the Written Artefact*. 39-51.

No Sizwe [Neville Alexander]. *One Azania, One Nation : The National Question in South Africa*. London : Zed, 1979.

Odendaal, Andre and Field, Roger. *Liberation Chabalala : The World of Alex La Guma*. Bellville : Mayibuye Books, 1993.

Ousmane, Sembene. *God's Bits of Wood*. London : Heinemann, 1970.

Parker, Kenneth. "Alex's Walk To Freedom." *Third World Book Review*. Eds. Martin Trump and Kofi Buenor. 2. 1 & 2 (1986) : 9-10.

-----."The Postmodern and the Postcolonial : J.M. Coetzee." *Critical Perspectives on J.M. Coetzee*. London : Macmillan, 1996. 83-104.

Pinnock, Donald. "Writing Left : Ruth First and radical South African journalism in the 1950s." Unpublished Doctoral thesis. Grahamstown, Rhodes University, 1992.

Plekhanov, Georgii, Valentinovich. *Unaddressed Letters, Art and Social Life*. Moscow : Foreign Languages Publishing, 1957.

Rabkin, David. "Drum Magazine (1951-61) and the works of Black Writers Associated with it." Unpublished Doctoral Thesis. Leeds University, 1975.

Rabkin, David. "La Guma and Reality in south Africa." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 8.1 (1973) : 54-62.

Ramamoorthy, Yashoda : "Wasted Ghosts in a Plague-ridden City : The Play of Abstract and Concrete in Alex La Guma's. *A Walk in the Night*." *African Literature Today*. Ed. R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi : Prestige Publishers, 1994. 99-111.

Rasebotsa, Nobantu N.L. "Politics and Literature : The Novels of Alex La Guma." Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Guelph, 1979.

Robin, Reginie. *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992.

Roscoe, Adrian. *Uhuru's Fire : African Literature engine.East to South*. Cambridge, London, New York, Melborne : 1977.

Saratovskaya, Larisa. "Alex La Guma." *Sovremennaya Literaturea YUAR : idei bor'by i protesta [Contemporary Literature of the Republic of South Africa : Ideas, Struggles, and Protests]*. A.G. Cheremin, L.B. Saratovskaya, N.P. Zemskov. Moscow : Nauka, 1988. 149-179.

Saratovskaya, Larisa. "South African Literature in Russia." *African Research and Documentation* 58 (1992) : 11-15.

Scheer, Barry, P. *Maxim Gorky*. Boston : Twayne, 1988.

Schipper, Mineke. *Beyond The Boundaries : African Literature and African Literary Theory*. London : Allison and Busby , 1989.

Shava, Piniel Viriri. *A People's Voice : Black South African Writing in the Twentieth Century*. London : Zed; Athens : Ohio University Press, 1989.

Shubin, Vladimir. Personal Interview 8 September 1994, Centre of Southern African Studies University of Western Cape.

Simons, Jack and Simons Ray. *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850 - 1950*. London : International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1983.

Skotnes, Cecil. "There is 'a singular lack of guts' in South African art." *Rand Daily Mail*. 3 November 1976 : 8.

Solzhenitsyn, Alexander. "The Role of Writers in Society." *South African Outlook* September 1972. 143-148.

Sougou, Omar. "Literature and Apartheid : Alex La Guma's Fiction." *Bridges* 4 (1994) : 35-47.

Spurr, David. *The Rhetoric of Empire : Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration*. Durham and London : Duke University Press, 1993.

-----, "Staggering admission." *Index on censorship* 5 (1987) : 1-5.

Terdiman, Richard. *Discourse and Counter-discourse : The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth Century France*. Ithaca and London : Cornell University Press, 1985.

"Tonight we have up my alley with us." Review of *Liberation Chabalala* by Alex La Guma. [Reviewed by Jeremy Cronin]. *African Communist* 135 (1993): 71-73.

Thorntorn, Susan. "In Pursuit of the State : Uses of the Detective Novel Form in Recent South African Fiction." *The Griot* 2 Fall (1992) : 29-38.

Tumedi, S.M. "Naturalism in two African Novels." *Marang* 6 (1986) : 54-66.

Tressel, Robert. *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. London : Flamingo, 1993.

Vaughan, Michael. "Storytelling and Politics in Fiction." *Rendering Things Visible*. Ed. Martin Trump. Johannesburg : Ravan Press, 1990. 186-204.

Wafawarowa, Brian. "Diversity and Coherence in Time of the Butcherbird." Unpublished paper read at a colloquium : Alex La Guma : journalism, writing and the representation of race

and place, held at University of Western Cape on 5 December 1995.

Wanjala, Chris. "The Face of Injustice : Alex La Guma's Fiction." *Standpoints on African Literature : A Critical Anthology*. Nairobi, Kampala, and Dar es Salaam : East African Literature Bureau, 1973. 305-322.

Watts, Jane. *Black Writers from South Africa*. Oxford : Macmillan, 1989.

Whitman, Scarlet [Barry Feinberg]. "A story of Resistance." Rev. of *Time of the Butcherbird* by Alex La Guma. *African Communist* 77 (1979) : 110-112.

Wolfe, Tom. *The New Journalism*, London : Picador, 1973.

Wright, Richard. *Native Son*. Harmondsworth. Middlesex : Penguin, 1940.