

Alex la Guma: A Literary and Political Biography of the South African Years

R.M. Field

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor
Litterarum in the Department of English,
University of the Western Cape



Key Words

La Guma

Political

Literary

Biography

Context

Influences

Journalism

Fiction

Comics

Painting

Abstract

Alex la Guma: A Literary and Political Biography of the South African Years

D. Litt. thesis, Department of English in the Faculty of Arts,
University of the Western Cape

In this thesis I examine the South African years (1925-1966) of Alex la Guma. While La Guma's father was an important role model, most critics have overlooked his mother's contribution to his literary and political development. Throughout the thesis I make the same point about Blanche, La Guma's wife, who supported him in many ways. I describe La Guma's infancy, childhood and adolescence, his father's political profile, how notions of race and writing, coloured identity, and family and political experiences created the conditions that enabled him to become a story teller and political activist.

By the late 1940s, the basic form and significance that his journalism, literature, politics and art would take had been established. From then until the early 1960s he was active in politics – particularly in the South African Coloured Peoples Organisation – and wrote many articles for *New Age*. La Guma saw himself as coloured. In his journalism and politics he participated in debates about coloured identity. I argue that Comintern and Soviet formulations and solutions to the National Question influenced his ideas about coloured identity. The Treason Trial (1956-1961) curtailed his political work but enabled him to experiment with new genres, such as comics and art reviews. The former testifies to his interest in and enjoyment of popular cultural forms, and there are references to popular culture throughout his work. I argue that while his first major prose piece, *A Walk in the Night*, and the short stories that appeared in the journal *Black Orpheus* established his literary reputation the comic, *The Adventures of Liberation Chabalala*, was his first major narrative.

Banning and house arrest removed him from the public sphere and denied him a South African audience. Between the early 1960s and his exile in 1966, he wrote several short stories, two more novels, a biography of his father and returned to painting. His second novel, *And a Threefold Cord*, relies heavily on Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Simultaneously, this reliance enabled La Guma to develop his own style and to accommodate feelings of isolation and loss precipitated by house arrest and the death of his parents. The biography of his father saw him experimenting with narrative techniques. Its content indicates how closely he identified his own family with the history of left wing politics in South Africa.

The later short stories and *The Stone Country* – the last novel he completed in South Africa – show that he drew on naturalism and Hemingway's brand of modernism. In *The Stone Country*, his concern with various forms of degeneration – a theme also evident in his early work – comes to the fore. He produced this novel during a period when he was under psychological strain that eventually led to a breakdown. Of all his work, this one displays the greatest tension between narrative design and content. La Guma's decision to copy Brueghel's *The Conversion of St Paul* was an unconscious expression of his emotional state. The act of copying offered little relief from his predicament.

In early 1966, he was arrested and held as a potential state witness in the trial of Fred Carneson. He refused to give evidence, and was determined to stay in South Africa despite the effect this had on his family. In mid 1966, on instructions from the liberation movement, he and his family left South Africa on exit permits.

November 2001

Declaration

I declare that *Alex la Guma: A Literary and Political Biography of the South African Years* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

ROGER MICHAEL FIELD

November 2001

SIGNED

Handwritten signature of Roger Michael Field in black ink, written over a dotted line.

Acknowledgements

This thesis has taken me nine years. During that time it became an obsession: an obsession with producing the best thesis of which I was capable; an obsession with finishing it.

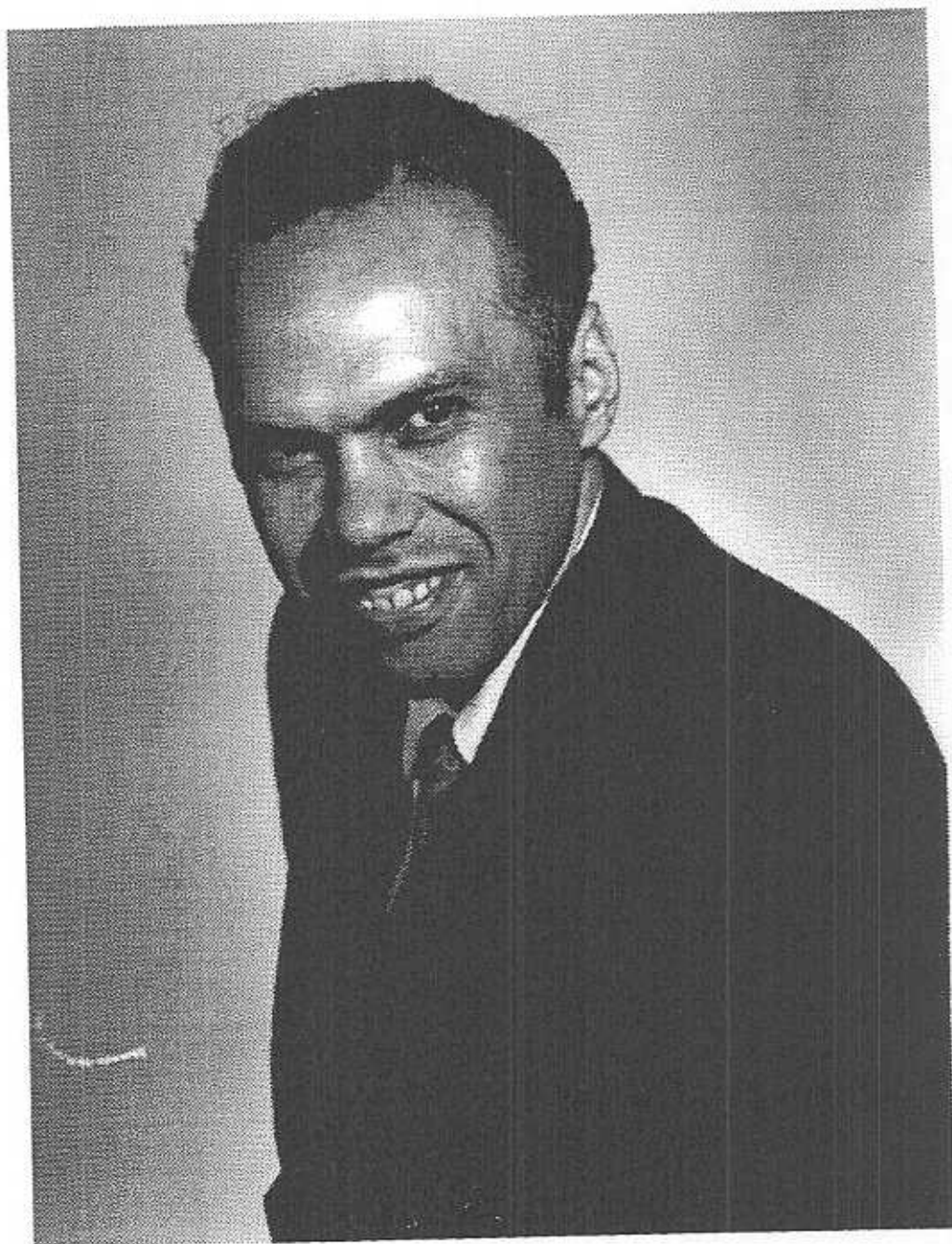
This thesis has taken up a disproportionate part of my own life and that of my family's. When I realised that my doctorate was older than my children and that my children hated my doctorate and hated my university, it was time to stop. Moira, Sophie and Gemma: I am sorry that I was 'elsewhere' so often. Thank you for supporting and bearing with me in all of this, and thank you for reminding me that at the end of the day it is just a doctorate.

Many other people and institutions made this thesis possible. The library staff at the University of the Western Cape, the University of Cape Town, the National Library of South Africa, the National Archives were efficient, helpful, humorous and patient with this researcher – at times – from hell. I wish to acknowledge the financial support of the Human Sciences Research Council and the University of the Western Cape. I also wish to thank my interviewees – in particular Blanche la Guma – who gave their present and their past.

Finally, I wish to thank my supervisors. Professors Colin Bundy and Jane Taylor were with me at the start. Professor Taylor was there in the middle. Professor Stan Ridge was there at the end. All brought different strengths and perspectives to the speaking, listening, reading and writing that went into this thesis. It was my challenging but rewarding task to integrate their comments into the present work.

Contents

Key words	i
Abstract	ii
Declaration	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter One: A man in an ordinary cloth cap	16
Chapter Two: Brown Sons of Africa	50
Chapter Three: The honey of a satirical philosophy	95
Chapter Four: This is the time for practical politics	144
Chapter Five: The muttering remained	202
Chapter Six: The clouds, pregnant with moisture	270
Chapter Seven: Well, I'll just start again, won't I?	340
Conclusion	396
Bibliography	427



Alex la Guma (Source: Mayibuye Centre)

Perhaps it is more difficult than most for a historian to speak of memory, for one who practices this profession – and for what deep-seated reasons? - whose essence is the act of juxtaposing debris with explosions of often barely recognizable remembrances, which are then clad by the imagination in order to conjoin them, to reconstruct them, to reconstruct an image, according to schema that arise, willy nilly, from oneself; to compose a figure that often stems less from the past than from the historian's dream.¹

Introduction

This thesis grew out of an interest in Alex la Guma's work that goes back to the late 1970s. I had left South Africa because I did not wish to be conscripted into the South African Defence Force which, under then Prime Minister P.W. Botha, was increasingly involved in maintaining apartheid. My first exposure to La Guma's works occurred in 1979, when I read *A Walk in the Night*. The novella had a profound effect on me. It was literary, it was political and, for someone who was homesick, it was about Cape Town. This was not the Cape Town in which I had grown up. It was a place that I now saw differently. Several factors drew me to La Guma's work. These included the quality of his writing, his descriptions of the home that I thought I knew, his representations of political problems and his gestures towards an alternative South Africa.

My interest in La Guma went through a second phase when I returned to South Africa in 1991, and started teaching at the University of the Western Cape the following year. In keeping with my interest in large theoretical issues, I initially conceived my thesis on a grand scale. I would write a biography of his life – no less – but as my research progressed, it became increasingly clear that a life study would make it difficult to sustain the degree of narrative detail and analytic depth that I felt La Guma deserved and a thesis required. Once I had decided to focus on a period of his life, I had to isolate a period. My own experience of exile and return prompted me to see his life in South Africa up to his exile as a 'natural' cut off point.

In this biographical study I question the founding moments in La Guma's autobiographical essays. They are not fictions, but they draw on fictional devices in order to dramatise moments of transition in his life. In putting forward the founding

moments of my academic autobiography I am conscious of doing the same. During the early nineties three significant events coincided. I read Gareth Cornwell's important M.A. thesis in which he suggested that 'thorough investigation of La Guma's journalism – most of which dates from the period which saw the publication of his first short stories – might well prove as rewarding as any such exploration of an author's raw or partially transmuted source material'.² Secondly, I read *A Soviet Journey*, La Guma's penultimate published text. Dennis Porter's *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing* deeply influenced the way in which I interpreted it.³ I had already developed an interest in psychoanalytic approaches to literature, but this work offered an inspiring example. Thirdly, I collaborated with André Odendaal on *Liberation Chabalala: The World of Alex La Guma*, an edited anthology of La Guma's writing and his serialised comic story. We drew on his work for *New Age* and its sister publications, and some of his lesser-known short stories.⁴ As a result, I found myself working on texts La Guma had produced at the beginning and end of his literary and political career. This set me thinking about phases and developments in his life and works between the late 1950s and the mid 1980s, and the social and political context in which he wrote them.

By the early twenty-first century there were several theses, book-length studies and many articles on La Guma's work.⁵ I take issue with several critics, but remain indebted to their insights. In the course of my thesis I will examine these in more detail. In part, this thesis is a history of La Guma's reception, but some broad comments are appropriate here since they too contribute to that aspect of the founding moment through which I establish the ways in which my thesis differs from those that preceded it.

With the partial exception of Chandramohan's comprehensive assessment, and even here I have reservations about the ways in which he situates La Guma and deploys his concept of 'trans-ethnicity', I found that most of these studies began with a brief description of his political activity before moving on to his texts, and that they concentrated on his longer prose fiction.⁶ It was sufficient to argue that La Guma had grown up in a politicised household and that, as Balutansky claims, he was a 'conscious

writer and activist whose ideology has led him to choose an esthetic that focuses on the collective experience of oppression and struggle rather than on individual experience'.⁷ This exemplifies the approach I will challenge. I do not mean to imply that La Guma was unconscious of what he wrote or that Balutansky's approach is naïve – my own understanding of La Guma has benefited greatly from her deployment of Lukácsian irony – or that conscious political and aesthetic choices are irrelevant. They *are* important factors, but I felt they required further exploration. My reading of *A Soviet Journey* suggested that La Guma had grown up in a more complex intellectual, emotional and political environment than most studies have hitherto acknowledged. I became increasingly curious about the nature of the links between political and other practices, discourses, genres and forms of representation. Could one translate the former into the latter directly, or were there intervening, mediating or inhibiting factors? If so, what might they be and how could one perceive or understand them separately from that which they constituted? *Liberation Chabalala* demonstrated that La Guma was far more than a journalist who had become a writer. In South Africa alone he wrote, drew sketches, produced a comic narrative, painted and conducted his political work in a sometimes contradictory and increasingly repressive environment. I felt that the wealth of historical detail which accumulated as my initial research progressed required a framework. It required a story.

All regions have their specificities. Despite the vibrancy of broad front anti-apartheid political organisations in the Western Cape during the 1980s, no other province has since returned to power a combination of political parties so closely associated with the apartheid era. It is unhelpful to explain this by claiming that the region's inhabitants are racist. I have not tried to find answers for how or why this 'return to power' occurred, but the question was at the back of my mind while I conducted my research and wrote this thesis. I could not help wondering how La Guma would have reacted to these developments, and whether we could learn any lessons from the 1958 elections in which the South African Coloured Peoples Organisation (SACPO) participated. In part, I wrote this thesis in order to understand my region and to discover whether, and/or in what ways, its political and literary dynamics had

changed between the late 1950s and the late 1990s. I hope that it will be of some use to those who do not usually look to literature for insights into the recent history of this region.

Much of this thesis touches on questions of classification and periodisation – of texts and genres, of periods, of regions, of truths. Inevitably, in the South African context, this must lead to questions of racial classification, power and identity. I have not used the terms ‘black’, ‘white’, ‘coloured’, ‘African’ and ‘Indian’ in order to tell people what their identities are or should be, or to confine them to the classifications of the apartheid era. Nor have I attempted to define for people who place themselves in these categories what their identity should be. For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that La Guma used these terms and descriptions like ‘non-white’ and ‘non-European’, saw himself as coloured and described others in racial terms.

Nor is this thesis about the origins of racial hierarchy, consciousness and identity. As Keegan has argued, ‘it is superfluous to argue about the origins of the South African racial order. Racial hierarchies were present from the beginnings of settlement at the Cape.’⁸ I take these hierarchies as given – not in the sense that one racial group is innately superior to others but in the sense that economic, political and ideological forces formed these hierarchies. By drawing on the significance for La Guma of the Native Republic thesis and the two-stage theory proposed by the Communist Party of South Africa, my thesis does explore how La Guma and the organisations with which he was associated and for which he worked between the late 1930s and the early 1960s developed ideas about coloured identity. In *Between the Wire and the Wall*, Lewis points out that in part the term ‘coloured’ is a ‘white-imposed’ category. Unlike Lewis, I do not think that La Guma tried to mobilise the majority of coloureds in the interests of a coloured elite.⁹ Instead, he and SACPO tried to mobilise coloureds as part of the national liberation struggle and the international anti-colonial movement in Africa. This thesis also challenges Goldin’s view that SACPO, an organisation in which La Guma played a leading role, ‘never sought in its activities to promote a distinct Coloured identity’.¹⁰ It was convenient, even necessary, for member organisations of the Congress Alliance to establish their constituencies on a racial basis, and in the case of

SACPO La Guma was concerned with coloured politics and coloured identity. My analysis of La Guma's published and unpublished work shows that he was deeply concerned with coloured identity, and that he sought to establish one that was integral to the liberation struggle.

* * *

The periodisation of any writer's work is an appealing and problematic task. Its appeal lies in the focus and concentration that it facilitates and in the new knowledge and insights it may generate, but what researchers include and augment in periodisation is as significant as what they ignore, repress or discard. Nor, as my thoughts about the Western Cape's recent past indicate, can any interpretation escape from its time and place. In addition, the study of a writer that periodises, draws on psychoanalysis and is biographical makes several different, simultaneous – and often competing – claims based on different forms of reasoning and different ideas about evidence. Some truth claims are taxonomic and inductive; some are methodological and based on the internal coherence of a theoretical framework; some are based on the assumption that primary sources – whether oral or textual – provide privileged information; some are discursive and assume, in general terms, that our knowledge of and access to the private inner and public social worlds of the past and present only occurs through various forms of discourse. My thesis draws on these and other ideas about argument, proof and truth. In the end, methodologies and interpretive frameworks can only produce one set of readings at the cost of other readings which they transcend, internalise and preserve (Hegel's *aufhebung*), or criticise, ignore or suppress. This is part of academic debate.

The problem of sources has a significant bearing on the question of evidence and its interpretation. Much of the material on which I have based the analysis of La Guma's parents' influences and his own origins as a writer comes from La Guma himself. This means that the nature of La Guma's memory and self-reflection play a large part in determining the narrative of his life. However, this does not mean that everything La Guma said or wrote about himself has no value until repackaged by the critic.

Accordingly, I have read this material in different ways. In some places I have read it against the grain. Elsewhere I have treated information from the same sources as historically reliable because, as Lejeune has warned, we should be wary of assuming that what we uncover 'through the text, in spite of the author', is always more important and more significant than what is lying on the surface.¹¹

Another problem is that there is plenty of material on some figures, but very little on others. La Guma's father Jimmy was a national and local public figure. His mother Wilhelmina worked outside the home, and indeed provided the household with its only regular income, but a sexual division of labour in the La Guma household appears to have confined Wilhelmina to the private and domestic sphere. There is relatively little documented information about her, apart from what La Guma recalled or wrote. I have used psychoanalytic theory to construct a domestic sphere on the assumption that a biographical study informed by psychoanalysis can provide useful insights into this realm. It can help us to discover hidden, lost or ignored aspects of the subject's life, particularly mother-child relationships. Turley's observation that representations of women in biographies of men offer 'explicit comment on the relation between the private and the public life' suggested that the relationship between Wilhelmina and her son Alex was worth pursuing.¹² There is, however, an inescapable circularity in this argument because the mother-son relationship only seems worth pursuing if one assumes that psychoanalysis has a truth-value and that its concepts and categories are internally coherent.

There are many ways in which we can draw on psychoanalytic theory in biographical studies. In particular, I have found Peter Brooks' study of literary plots extremely useful. Brooks lists a number of options. One can 'psychoanalyze authors or readers or characters in narrative', or one can assume a correspondence between 'psychic functioning' and 'textual functioning'.¹³ Despite some reservations, I have explored both of these options. My first reservation concerns the psychoanalysis of authors, readers and characters. It raises the question of how one 'applies' psychoanalysis to the study of writers and their works.¹⁴ I hope that my analyses of the ways in which La Guma used the work of John Steinbeck and Pieter Brueghel in this

thesis will provide one answer. My second reservation concerns the idea of correspondence between psychic and textual functioning. For me the problem here is not the use of analogical reasoning – literature and literary analysis would be all but impossible without recourse to analogy – but the assumption that psyche and text have the same ontological status. This assumption may be what Derrida had in mind when he criticised ‘the habitual psychoanalysis of literature’, which ‘begins by putting the literary signifier as such within parentheses’. In the context of his analysis of Rousseau, Derrida’s reservations were that

psychoanalytic theory itself is for me a collection of texts belonging to my history and my culture. To that extent, if it marks my reading and the writing of my interpretation, it does not do so as a principle of truth that one could abstract from the textual system that I inhabit in order to illuminate it with complete neutrality. In a certain way, in am *within* the history of psychoanalysis as I am *within* Rousseau’s text. Just as Rousseau drew upon language that was already there... we operate today within a certain network of significations marked by psychoanalytic theory, even if we do not master it and even if we are assured of never being able to master it perfectly.¹⁵

I take Derrida to mean that one cannot turn the ‘literary [or political] signifier’ into a static object upon which the biographer works in a deductive manner to ‘prove’ something about the subject. Nor is it possible to stand outside the signifiers of South Africa’s recent past or of psychoanalysis – as my earlier point about the links between mother-son relationships suggested.

Despite these reservations I have retained a commitment to (a faith in?) this body of knowledge. I find it intellectually challenging; it encourages methodological self-consciousness and self reflection (but only by constituting a self that reflects by understanding itself in a particular way); it problematises everyday assumptions about time, narrative, subjectivity and gender. Psychoanalytically-informed biography also challenges the conventional chronologies of a life that Mary Evans characterises as ‘a

“male” form of biography’.¹⁶ This thesis is not a feminist reading of a masculine subject, but Evans’ views have helped me to look at La Guma in a new light. According to her, the “‘male form of biography’” tends to gloss over or ignore its subject’s early years. It concentrates on the adult’s apparently rational and self-directed achievements. In so doing, it establishes an artificial division between the ‘public’ and the ‘personal’ domains in order to suppress or ignore the very real possibility that ‘professional men might not be fully in command of their emotional lives, let alone conversant with them’.¹⁷ In my thesis I have tried to establish connections between La Guma’s childhood and adulthood and the private and public domains of his life – not to expose ‘weaknesses’ but to paint a fuller picture of him, and to find links between the various forms of representation in which he worked.

A psychoanalytically-informed interpretation of biography can challenge linear chronologies by highlighting the complex relationship between the order in which subjects present events in their own lives, the order in which documents present that life, and the order in which the biography presents them. In his study of Freud’s ‘Wolf Man’, Brooks notes that Freud aimed ‘to tell, both “at once” and “in order”, the story of a person, the story of an illness, the story of an investigation, the story of an explanation; and “meaning” must ultimately lie in the effective interrelationship of all of these’.¹⁸ I have not dispensed with a linear chronology, nor can I claim to have integrated all these stories into every stage of my thesis, but the importance of finding and retaining connections between them and of viewing the atemporal qualities of the unconscious, with its simultaneous stories, as a guide to the elucidation of specific moments has guided my efforts.

Another extremely useful aspect of Brooks’ analysis of the ‘Wolf Man’ concerns his treatment of the ‘primal scene’. The primal scene is a popular narrative trope among biographers. Its use has been criticised and mocked. For an exasperated Cioffi, ‘there is nothing like a primal scene or horrific castration fantasy to jazz a narrative up’. In search of a *frisson* that may not harm sales and add a little excitement, the biographer’s ‘application of Freud-inspired accounts of the influence of childhood to the lives of historical and cultural figures has become as mechanical as brick-laying’.¹⁹ I do not

know what Cioffi knows about brick-laying, but he is right to criticise the mechanical use of any theoretical framework. Without applying Brooks rigidly, I have tried to inform my use of the primal scene with his observation that Freud revised this case history several times, but without removing the signs of his earlier analyses. He has argued that Freud replaced 'a founding event [with] a phantasy or fiction on which is conferred all the authority and force of a prime mover'. In this thesis I have regarded Freud's biography of the 'Wolf Man' as 'another kind of referentiality, in that all tales may lead us back not so much to events as to other tales'. Each of us is, in effect, 'a structure of the fictions' we tell about ourselves.²⁰ Clearly, biographical and autobiographical modes are closely related. I hope this point will emerge from the early chapters of the thesis, which deal with the primal scene and the later ones that examine *And a Threefold Cord* and *The Stone Country*.

* * *

Cecil Abrahams' book on La Guma contains valuable interview material.²¹ Elsewhere he has transformed some of this material into an autobiographical essay by La Guma.²² As the product of several interpretative strategies involving La Guma as writer and interviewee, and Abrahams as interviewer and writer, the identity of that essay's speaker will always be unclear. Abrahams has dissolved something that is not always obvious but whose idea should be preserved – 'the border between the biographer's discourse and that of his subject' – but without any evident awareness of what he has done.²³ By design or default, Abrahams' work on La Guma has produced for later biographers and researchers (like myself) what David Turley, in his work on biographies of the young Abraham Lincoln, has described as not so much 'enabling intellectual structures with which to make sense of the life than traps out which it [is] difficult to break'.²⁴ Abrahams has (re)presented his subject as given and preformed without any sense of the way in which he (Abrahams) as a writer writing about the writer (La Guma) has done so.

I interviewed several of La Guma's contemporaries for this thesis. While I have attempted to reconstruct La Guma's thinking on certain issues, this thesis does not try to present his worldview in a comprehensive, objective manner. Rather, it is a partial and intersubjective account of aspects of one person's life and work for which I take responsibility. This focuses our attention on factors that affect my use of texts that are simultaneously biographical and autobiographical: the possibility of relations of transference and countertransference between the interviewer and interviewee. From a Freudian perspective, transference involves the analysis and carrying over (transferring) of significant elements of an important previous experience or relationship into the relationship with the analyst. In countertransference, the analyst, interviewer or researcher carries over and unconsciously repeats aspects of significant experiences or relationships in his or her interaction with the analysand, interviewee or subject of study.

Responses to this problem vary. Edel goes so far as to claim that all biographers are 'trapped in transferences'.²⁵ Moraitis embarked on a psychoanalytic study of a student who was writing about Nietzsche. Traditionally one equates the biographer or historian with the analyst and the biographical subject with the analysand. For Moraitis, this is not necessarily so:

Analyst and analysand are two people working together and learning from each other. I learned a good deal from Nietzsche, whereas Nietzsche obviously learned nothing from me. If I had to compare my experience of reading Nietzsche with the analytic situation, it might be more appropriate to see Nietzsche as the analyst and the reader as the analysand. Whereas the reader provided the associations, Nietzsche provided the interpretations.²⁶

Moraitis' study suggests that the biographers look for answers even if they do not know what the questions are, and that historians and biographers do not 'control' their topics. Further, in the absence of an interactive relationship between the biographer and topic it is the latter that remains unmoved and the source of knowledge.

Lejeune is not directly concerned with transference. He is interested in 'autobiographical collaborations', and how the interaction between the interviewee and interviewer affects what we are able to learn about our subject. For Lejeune, 'writer' and 'model' (in my case Abrahams and La Guma respectively) possess each other by exchanging places in the collaborative process. But since the biographer, whether it is Abrahams on La Guma, or myself on Abrahams on La Guma, is in a position to shape the finished product, the collaboration exposes 'the secrets of fabrication and functioning of the "natural" product', i.e. the apparent naturalness of the life story. This leads to the view that the 'autobiographical form' 'determines the very existence of "subjects"' not – as we might expect – the other way round.²⁷ There is an additional consideration that alerts us to the limitations of collaborative texts. By June 1978, when Abrahams began to interview him, La Guma was an internationally established writer. We are dealing with Abrahams' construction of La Guma as a writer based on the possibility that in reconstructing his past – and with Abrahams' collaboration – La Guma saw himself then as a writer-in-the-making. This is an important consideration for a biography that focuses on the early part of its subject's life, for the biographer is often under a strong temptation to interpret apparently innocuous or inconsequential events as harbingers of a later destiny.²⁸ In that respect, biographers seldom have complete control over their stories even if they 'shape' the finished product.

The fact that La Guma wrote a biography of his father during the period under consideration added an additional level of reflection and self-reflection to this thesis. When I reached that point in my thesis – when the person about whom I was writing became a biographer himself – I found myself confronting the assumptions that underpinned techniques I was using to narrate and analyse his life. Questions that I faced here concerned La Guma's personal life and what Eribon, in his biography of Foucault, calls 'the subtle forms of repression and censorship that await all writers' of biographies.²⁹ As a whole this biographical study focuses on La Guma's literary, artistic and political work in South Africa. While his personal life is not my main concern, it would have been impossible to write this thesis without exploring some personal aspects and the vital role that his wife, Blanche, played. Perhaps there is a voyeuristic element in

all life studies, but where I have written about La Guma's personal life, my aim has been to show what he experienced, suffered and achieved rather than to undermine his public image. In short, I have not tried to make him less heroic but to make him more human. With regard to La Guma's biography of his father, I do not know what La Guma excluded and therefore what sort of pressure he experienced. In my case, in discussing La Guma's biography of his father, I felt obliged to deal with theoretical issues that I would rather have saved for my introduction and conclusion. I resolved this problem by treating the biography as a statement about a father-son relationship played out or mediated through working class and trade union history. The pressures that I faced at that point emerged from the way in which I had constituted the imaginary or intended audience of my thesis and the extent to which I felt 'we' might assume what was true, *what* might require explanation and *when* it might require explanation.³⁰

* * *

La Guma's autobiographical pieces first appeared in publications closely associated with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the South African Communist Party.³¹ These pieces set out to demonstrate the historical inevitability and moral value of his decision to join the SACP. This raised a problem: whether I should privilege Marxism as a form of biographical and autobiographical discourse because it was real for my subject and for myself. Historical and dialectical materialism assume various forms and degrees of historical and social causality. They offer forms of thought that constitute the subject and the nature of that subject's self-reflection. Therefore they operate as biographical and autobiographical narrative devices. In this thesis I have treated them as both.

The texts in question also display rapid shifts between moments in childhood and adulthood, and this gives these texts a fictional quality. Here I have considered Lejeunes's suggestion that we should 'abandon the code of autobiographical verisimilitude (of the "natural") and enter into the space of fiction' when dealing with autobiographical narratives of childhood.³² Adult reconstructions of the world of a child or of one's own childhood depend heavily upon a variety of devices. These may be

fictional, or 'distorted from the truth, and interspersed with imaginary elements'.³³ This was a view shared by Richard Rive, one of La Guma's literary contemporaries, who described autobiography in general and his own in particular as 'structurally the marriage between personal history and the novel'.³⁴ Here Brooks' and Lejeune's references to fiction reflect a concern about the way in which many autobiographies tend to suppress questions about the narrative structure of their texts. Such questions undermine the plausibility of the autobiography by drawing attention to the artificiality of what is often a linear narrative.³⁵ However Lejeune takes his enquiry even further. If it is possible to question the order of a narrative that purports to represent the order of lived experience, then it is possible to question two related assumptions of much historical enquiry: the existence of a 'past in itself', and 'relationships of causality'.³⁶ Many of the theorists whom I have quoted in this introduction argue that we have no direct access to the past or that we can never know it in itself. In my thesis I assume that 'the past in itself' exists but that we have no direct or unmediated access to it. I accept the existence of causality, though I do not always accept the ways in which some of the critics surveyed have used it.

Given the diversity of La Guma's output there have been times when I have felt it was more desirable to include information – even if it made the story unwieldy – rather than exclude it in the interests of an internally coherent narrative. Though I still derive immense pleasure from the play of theory and the analysis of literary texts, this thesis has helped me to assess the necessity for and the limitations of theory, to view theory in a more informed and holistic manner, and to realise that textual and graphic meanings and biographical narratives are provisional, elusive and contingent constructions. I do not believe that biographers can ever have the last word. Despite a 'desire to keep the biographical subject securely in the Panopticon' – an appropriate image since the original setting for *The Stone Country* was constructed on Benthamite principles – biographers cannot and should not try to 'contain' their 'subjects'.³⁷

Endnotes

- ¹ G. Duby, 'Memories with No Historian', *Yale French Studies* No. 59, 1980, p. 7.
- ² G. Cornwell, 'Protest in fiction: an approach to Alex la Guma' (Rhodes University, M.A. thesis, 1979), p. 100.
- ³ A. la Guma, *A Soviet Journey* (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975); D. Porter, *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1991).
- ⁴ A. Odendaal and R. Field (eds), *Liberation Chabalala: The World of Alex La Guma* (Mayibuye Press, Bellville, 1993).
- ⁵ I could not obtain Nahem Yousaf's book *Alex La Guma: Politics and Resistance* (Heinemann, Portsmouth, 2001) before I completed this thesis.
- ⁶ B. Chandramohan, *A Study in Trans-Ethnicity in Modern South Africa: The Writings of Alex la Guma* (Mellen University Research Press, Lampeter, 1992).
- ⁷ K. Balutansky, *The Novels of Alex La Guma: The Representation of a Political Conflict* (Three Continents Press, Washington, 1990), p. 2.
- ⁸ T. Keegan, *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1996), p. 281.
- ⁹ G. Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall: A History of South African 'Coloured' Politics* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1987), p. 4.
- ¹⁰ I. Goldin, *Making Race: The Politics and Economics of Coloured Identity in South Africa* (Maskew Miller Longman, Cape Town, 1987), pp. 118-119.
- ¹¹ P. Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Pact', in P. Lejeune, *On Autobiography* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1989), p. 14.
- ¹² D. Turley, 'A Usable Life: Popular Representations of Abraham Lincoln', in D. Ellis (ed.), *Imitating Art: Essays in Biography* (Pluto Press, London, 1993), p. 64.
- ¹³ P. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1984), p. 90.
- ¹⁴ D. Turley, 'A Usable Life...', p. 59.
- ¹⁵ J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, (Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1982), p. 160.
- ¹⁶ M. Evans, 'Masculine and Feminine Biography', in D. Ellis (ed.), *Imitating Art: Essays in Biography*, p. 109.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- ¹⁸ P. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 273.
- ¹⁹ D. Ellis, 'Introduction: Explanation in Biography: A Conversation with Frank Cioffi', in D. Ellis (ed.), *Imitating Art*, pp. 2-3.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 276, 277.
- ²¹ C. Abrahams, *Alex La Guma* (Boston, Twayne, 1985).
- ²² A. la Guma, 'The Real Picture: Interview with Cecil Abrahams', in C. Abrahams (ed.), *Memories of Home: The Writings of Alex La Guma* (Trenton, Africa World Press, 1991), pp. 15-29.
- ²³ M. Sheringham, 'The Philosopher, the Poet and the Kaiser: Sartre and Biographical Understanding', in D. Ellis, (ed.), *Imitating Art*, p. 94.
- ²⁴ D. Turley, 'A Usable Life...', p. 59.
- ²⁵ L. Edel, 'Confessions of a Biographer', in G. Moraitis and G.H. Pollock (eds), *Psychoanalytic Studies of Biography* (International Universities Press, Madison, 1987), p. 25.
- ²⁶ G. Moraitis, 'A Psychologist's Journey into a Historian's World: An Experiment in Collaboration', in G. Moraitis and G.H. Pollock (eds), *Psychoanalytic Studies of Biography*, p. 526.

-
- ²⁷ P. Lejeune, 'The Autobiography of Those Who Do Not Write', in *On Autobiography*, pp. 186, 192.
- ²⁸ D. Turley, 'A Usable Life...', p. 61.
- ²⁹ D. Eribon, *Michel Foucault* (Faber and Faber, London, 1993), p. x.
- ³⁰ D. Ellis, 'Introduction: Explanation in Biography...', p. 6.
- ³¹ A. la Guma, 'To *Literary Gazette*, in C. Abrahams (ed.), *Memories of Home*, pp. 37-42; 'Why I Joined the Communist Party' *The African Communist* No. 47 (1971) pp. 57-61; 'Doing Something Useful' *The African Communist* No. 89 (1982) pp. 49-52.
- ³² P. Lejeune, 'The Ironic Narrative of Childhood: Vallès', in *On Autobiography*, p. 53.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 57; S. Freud, 'From the History of an Infantile Neurosis (The "Wolf Man")', in S. Freud, *Case Histories* Vol. II (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979), 284.
- ³⁴ R. Rive, *Writing Black* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1981), p. 1.
- ³⁵ P. Lejeune, 'The Order of Narrative in Sartre's *Les Mots*, in *On Autobiography*, p. 71.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 100.
- ³⁷ M. Sheringham, 'The Philosopher, the Poet and the Kaiser...', p. 84.

Chapter One

A man in an ordinary cloth cap

'Dingaan's Day' 1929, and there is a protest march through Cape Town. Four-year old Alex la Guma sits on the shoulders of Dora Alexander clutching his black, green and gold flag. These are the colours of the African National Congress which, with the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union and the Communist Party of South Africa, had organised the demonstration to protest against Minister of Justice Oswald Pirow's proposed amendment to the Riotous Assemblies Act.¹ La Guma later described this incident as his 'first experience in the people's struggle'. If nothing else, this story suggests that La Guma's political education owes more to the women in his life than he and several commentators have acknowledged. Most have concentrated on his father's role which, by comparison, is well-documented and occupies the public domain.

There can be no question that La Guma's father, James Arnold (Jimmy) la Guma was a remarkable man. At that time he was one of the few coloured political and trade union figures from a working class background, and he influenced his son Alex in many ways.² La Guma acknowledged this when he said that his 'father had a great deal to do with moulding [his] philosophical and political outlook and guiding [him] towards the reading of serious works, both political and literary'.³ Jimmy was certainly influential, but his son's tribute begs the question of what might have influenced him at a preverbal and preliterate stage. By drawing on a range of psychoanalytic theories I will show that Jimmy was not the only significant figure in La Guma's early life. In this respect my aim is to question and refine the 'law of the father' – the uncritically accepted assumption that there was no other influence – as applied to Jimmy and his son by showing that the 'lore of the mother' – a less text-bound source of identity – was an important element in the development of Alex la Guma as 'political animal' and story teller.

Ambassadors of Garvey

There is some uncertainty about Jimmy's early years. La Guma and his sister Joan have provided accounts of this period which stress different details. According to La Guma, his father James Arnold (Jimmy) la Guma's parents arrived in South Africa sometime in the nineteenth century. His father was born in 1894. Jimmy may have been the son of a 'French official and a woman of the royal house of a tribal queen in Madagascar'. Alternatively, his parents may have come from Madagascar and have been 'of Indonesian and German extraction'.⁴ According to Joan, Jimmy's father was a travelling cobbler based in Simonstown, with relatives there and an uncle in Parow.⁵ Death certificates in the Cape Archives indicate that the Lagumas, La Gumas or Legumas were living in Simonstown by at least 1867.⁶ To this day, the majority of La Gumas or Lagumas live in Ocean View, a coloured township near Kommetjie in the southern Cape Peninsula to which coloured residents of Simonstown were forcibly removed.⁷

Nor is there any certainty about where Jimmy was born. According to a brief biography in the *Cape Standard*, Jimmy was born in Natal, but La Guma's much later biography of his father cites Bloemfontein.⁸ He had a sister Marinnet, also known as 'Netta', who married in Durban. Jimmy and Netta's parents both died when he was very young, and the fact that a short period separates their deaths suggests that an epidemic or catastrophe may have been the cause. According to Alex, a washerwoman adopted Jimmy and in 1902, aged eight, he ended up in the bakery of a coloured businessperson in Parow outside Cape Town.⁹

Some time after this, Jimmy's adoptive family moved to Cape Town and he was able to attend school up to standard two. Family poverty forced him back to work as a messenger, though in later life many of his contemporaries found it hard to believe that his formal education had been so limited.¹⁰ Their poverty appears to have coincided with economic depression in Cape Town after the Anglo-Boer War and this, according to the stories he told his son, led to his first political experiences.¹¹ In 1906, at the age of 12, Jimmy found himself participating in 'direct action' bread

riots as unemployed workers in Cape Town broke bakery windows and stole bread. According to La Guma, in his brief biography of his father,

At one stage desperate workers took direct action and invaded shops in the centre of the city. Jimmy found himself in the thick of it, hurling armloads of bread out through the smashed windows of bakery shops into the scrambling, clutching hands of cheering workers. With them, he dodged the police charges on the demonstrations. For him it was a mixture of fun, adventure and participation in the class struggle.¹²

That year, or the year after, he began an apprenticeship as a leather worker in Cape Town, but does not appear to have completed his training. Jimmy and two friends jumped a 'goods-train heading north out of Cape Town', but by the time they reached Wellington they were homesick, and they returned to Cape Town on a coal train.¹³ Thus by the age of thirteen some of Jimmy's characteristics – direct action, restlessness and association with working class politics – were already in place.

In 1910, he signed a labour contract to work in German South West Africa (SWA). This eventually led to contact with Clements Kadalie's Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU), and while in the diamond fields he participated in a strike committee made up of local and contract workers. Barred from the diamond fields due to his trade union activity, he became a medical orderly, ship's stoker and later tugboat pilot.¹⁴ Jimmy's work on boats during 1919 probably exposed him to the news that in December 1919 the ICU had organised a strike among Cape Town dockworkers, and he formed an ICU branch in Luderitz.¹⁵ This early association between dockworkers and trade union action may have led his son, in one of his earliest pieces on coloured identity, to use a Cape Town dockworker to express opposition to the National Party. Two years after forming the ICU's Luderitz branch, Jimmy returned to Cape Town at Kadalie's invitation to take up the post of Assistant General Secretary and to manage the *Worker's Herald*, the ICU's paper. This appears to have been the first of his several involvements in a range of

broad front organisations. In 1922, he was sent to Port Elizabeth to reorganize the ICU branch.¹⁶ He could not have stayed there very long, since the following year he was elected ICU General Secretary, and in 1924 he became secretary of the United Non-European Congress, an organisation founded by Sarojini Naidu on her first visit to South Africa. This was also the year in which he married Wilhelmina Anne Alexander and met John (Jimmy) Gomas, the political activist and trade unionist with whom he eventually parted political company.¹⁷

Trade unionism was not the only political discourse to which Jimmy la Guma was exposed in SWA and Cape Town. In the early decades of the twentieth century, when Jimmy's formal political career was taking shape, the ideas of Marcus Garvey and the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) influenced the ICU; Kadalie made clear his intention of imitating Marcus Garvey while ICU leaders, of whom Jimmy was one, were often regarded as 'ambassadors of Marcus Garvey'.¹⁸ Among Jimmy's comrades in 1920, when he was setting up an ICU branch in Luderitz, were figures such as John de Clue, who was also a leading local member of the UNIA. By the following year, when Jimmy returned to Cape Town at Kadalie's request, the UNIA had a presence in Cape Town and surrounding areas.¹⁹ Garveyism also helped shape the politics of the African National Congress in the Western Cape, and complemented the Native Republic debate within the Communist Party of South Africa. If Hill and Pirio are correct that Garveyism was 'a potent expression of mass-based African nationalism' and a challenge to 'the impartiality and supremacy of Britain as the ultimate protector of African interests' (a notion held by 'African petit-bourgeois leadership' such as D.D.T. Jabavu, who had ascribed the Port Elizabeth riots that preceded Jimmy's brief period there to Garveyism), then it would also have provided a sympathetic political environment for a working class radical such as Jimmy la Guma.²⁰ Jimmy would soon feature prominently in this debate, and later it would also feature in his son's assertions and defences of coloured identity.²¹ It was also around this time that Jimmy began to articulate the need for the leadership of organisations fighting for national liberation to be predominantly black.²² At the same time Jimmy believed that coloureds

constituted a distinct group with a distinct identity, and later he used Garveyite notions of 'race pride' to foster a specific coloured identity in the Cape. Both of these tendencies would feature in his son's politics and writing.

Details about La Guma's mother's antecedents are as vague as his father's. Available accounts agree that Wilhelmina Anne (Minnie) Alexander's father was a carpenter; there is less agreement whether he was Scottish or coloured, and whether he was on the margins of the African Political Organisation (APO). Founded in 1902, the APO was the only significant political organisation for coloureds in the early decades of the twentieth century. It was a major contributor in this period to the formation of a coloured cultural and political identity.²³ Despite its name, APO membership was confined to coloureds, and drew its membership primarily from urban coloured elites such as artisans, petty entrepreneurs, clerks, commercial assistants, shop owners and professionals, many of whom were teachers or priests.²⁴ In the first decade of the century the APO called for a specific policy towards coloureds as distinct from Africans, while simultaneously proposing cooperation between coloureds and Africans. It also demanded political equality for all who conformed to notions of civilization drawn from a western European, primarily British, tradition. These positions might seem contradictory from a purist or more contemporary perspective, but as Lewis has argued they were rational responses to the perceived marginality of coloureds in national terms, an attempt to capitalise on the concentration of coloureds in the Cape and an acknowledgement that all sections of the oppressed had common interests *vis-à-vis* the oppressor as imperial promises of political equality and access to land were shelved or betrayed in the perceived interest of white settler unity following the Anglo-Boer War.²⁵ These factors would play a part in defining the political framework within which Jimmy and his son operated.

According to La Guma, Wilhelmina's mother, Lena Fruzela, 'had been beautiful, with her Javanese ancestry in her looks'. She had worked as a 'maid' in the parliamentary buildings of the Cape Colony before Union in 1910. According to family legend, John X. Merriman, a prominent turn-of-the-century liberal politician,

asked her to be his mistress, but she refused, and married Alexander.²⁶ If Bunche's account of his 1937 South African travels are any guide, then Merriman's behaviour was not unusual for people in his position. While in Cape Town, Bunche noted that 'Malay girls are most attractive. Some are mistresses of leading whites in town. One big white politician recently had to pay £600 for the return of some letters he had written to his Malay mistress.'²⁷ Later, drawing on Freud, I will argue that this 'family romance' contributed to the process by which La Guma formed images or 'internal objects' of masculinity and femininity in his childhood and that these internal objects remained a feature of his literature and politics.

Jimmy and Wilhelmina had known each other since adolescence, and they married in the year he returned from SWA. According to Adhikari, her parents, particularly her father, opposed the marriage because Jimmy had 'no profession'.²⁸ This reservation would have been entirely compatible with the more 'respectable' membership of the APO and the emphasis which many of the early organisations and figures associated with coloured politics placed on self-improvement and education in contrast to the ICU. The latter was at that stage also primarily a Cape-based organisation, but drew its membership from 'stevedores... railway workers and unskilled workers in every type of employment'. It was only after Alexander's death in 1923 that Jimmy and Minnie could marry *and* that Jimmy could continue with his political work.²⁹ In the early years of their marriage the couple lived with Lena at the Tennant Street end of Roger Street, later moving into the house next door. Exactly when they moved there is unclear, for between 1917 and 1931 local directories merely describe the residents of numbers 1 and 3 Roger Street as 'Coloured', though from 1932 the listed occupants of 1 and 3 Roger Street were J. la Guma, occupation listed as 'engineer', and a Mrs R. or M. Alexander respectively.³⁰

Before their marriage, Wilhelmina worked at the United Tobacco Company's cigarette factory, and appears to have been employed there until the late 1930s, but when her husband and Gomas organised laundry and tobacco workers between 1937 and 1938, she was fired as a result of her husband's trade union work.³¹ For most of

his life Jimmy earned very little, and Wilhelmina was the main breadwinner with factory work supplemented by knitting and crochet work at home. While she was away at work, her mother looked after the child.³² There was an apparently strict and conventional division of labour in Jimmy and Wilhelmina's relationship, which placed him in the sphere of politics and 'culture' and located her, as a woman, 'lower on the scale of transcendence than man'.³³ He operated in the public world of politics, the trade union movement and political, intellectual and cultural debate. She was the primary and most reliable breadwinner, resigning herself to her husband's frequent absences. According to her daughter Joan, La Guma's younger sister, Wilhelmina was 'very domesticated'. Wilhelmina was concerned with keeping the home clean, and always ensured that her husband looked neat and smart for political meetings.³⁴ Yet, as I shall argue later, La Guma's early political experiences and education relied more on his mother and mother figures than either he or much critical work could directly acknowledge.

In the year following Jimmy and Wilhemina's marriage, Jimmy and his friend Gomas joined the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) which was now open to all races. On 25 February 1925, Justin Alexander la Guma was born. Jimmy seems to have travelled considerably that year. Based at the ICU's Johannesburg headquarters during early 1926, he went on a national tour of the organisation's branches, and he appears to have remained in Johannesburg until about December 1926.³⁵ There is no indication that his wife and child joined him, and this might have seemed unnecessary. The CPSA headquarters was in Cape Town at that time, and in 1926 he was elected to the Party's Central Executive Committee.³⁶ That year, the ICU executive committee met first in Cape Town, and later in Port Elizabeth during December.³⁷ In the course of the second meeting a number of CPSA members, including Jimmy, were expelled from the ICU. The ICU had introduced a policy which forbade membership of both organisations. Several histories of the expulsion, including La Guma's description of it in his biography of Jimmy, have represented this as a significant moment in the Party's radicalisation, its growing affinity with the interests of the African working class, and as confirmation of the expelled members'

personal and political integrity.³⁸ Other scholars disagree. Wickins accepts that Kadalie's behaviour was sometimes 'puerile' and that there were grounds for viewing the ICU National Council as conservative, bureaucratic and corrupt at times, that whites who influenced Kadalie were anti-communist and that the Party members were 'clean', but he questions the CP's claim that the ICU lacked any militancy or was completely indifferent to corruption. He notes that Jimmy, as General Secretary, could have used his own position to get rid of dishonesty in the branches and questions the CP view that it, rather than the ICU, came off better from this conflict.³⁹ Taking a different approach, Goldin argues that the Garveyism of ICU leaders and the state's early efforts to provide coloureds with a degree of privilege relative to Africans were significant factors.⁴⁰ Whatever the reasons and dynamics, the expulsions represented a turning point in the life of the CPSA, coinciding as they did with the intensification of a 'divide-and-rule' policy towards Africans and coloureds, and the state's intervention in the formation of a coloured identity. These were issues which both Jimmy and Alex la Guma would confront at various stages in their respective political careers. After his expulsion, La Guma returned to Cape Town, where he became involved in the Party and the African National Congress in the Western Cape. Garveyism still exerted a considerable political and symbolic influence on the national liberation movement in the Western Cape through slogans, logos, and an overlapping leadership between the UNIA, ICU and the ANC in the region. The Western Cape ANC also drew on UNIA symbolism, for it named its headquarters 'Liberty Hall' after the UNIA's 'spiritual centre' in New York.⁴¹

Intensely proud of his proletarian birth

In 1927, Jimmy made two trips to the Soviet Union that would have an impact on his own and his son's literary, political and emotional attachments. On the first trip he, ANC president J.T. Gumede and Daniel Colrairie of the SA Trade Union Congress attended a conference in Brussels organised by the League Against Imperialism. After the conference, La Guma went on a speaking tour of Germany, where he addressed audiences in German, which he had learnt in SWA, and then

travelled to the Soviet Union. Jimmy returned to South Africa in April firmly convinced that the Comintern's slogan of an 'Independent Native Republic as a stage towards a workers' and peasants' government, with full guarantees for the rights of minorities' represented the correct approach to the South African situation.⁴² La Guma devoted 30 out of the 115 pages of his biography of Jimmy to this issue. While it was of unquestionable significance to the CPSA at this time, this was not necessarily all that made it important to La Guma in the early 1960s when he wrote it. I will analyse the biography in more detail in a subsequent chapter dealing with the circumstances in which he wrote this text.

Later that year Jimmy returned to Moscow for the celebrations marking the tenth anniversary of the October 1917 Revolution. He attended banquets and balls, and on one occasion danced with Alexandré Kollantai.⁴³ In a tour whose destinations reflected Comintern thinking at the time on the national and colonial questions as much as linguistic convenience, he visited Georgia and Azerbaijan as part of a combined British, American and Irish delegation, returning to Cape Town in January 1928 with a 'heavy overcoat and a traditional Russian fur cap' and a colour picture of Lenin. This image would become an important reference point in his own and his son's life.⁴⁴ Later in this chapter, the pride of place which this picture occupied will be used to show why Jimmy remained an 'intense supporter' of the Soviet Union all his life.

The route of Jimmy's trip seems to have coincided in part with that of the American writer Theodore Dreiser, though Jimmy has not indicated whether they had any contact. Both met Kollantai and both visited Baku.⁴⁵ According to Swanberg, Dreiser was ambivalent about the parades he saw. Although 'the decorations reminded Dreiser of "a 14th St Fire Sale" he was moved by the seeming national unity and hope'. By contrast, Jimmy la Guma saw 'huge banners [that] called on the people to put their backs into the building of Socialism in the USSR. Communist Party organisers and administrators worked day in and night out with unrelenting energy and enthusiasm.' Further investigation of this point might add

greater substance to the argument that La Guma was influenced by American Naturalism.⁴⁶

In April 1928 the La Guma family moved to Johannesburg so that Jimmy could take up the post of General Secretary of the Federation of Non-European Trade Unions, but they did not stay there very long, for 'lack of proper accommodation' and the weather had a 'detrimental effect' on La Guma, then three years old.⁴⁷ It is difficult to ascertain whether the young Alex really was sick, since neither his father's nor his own contemporaries can recall any references he made to ill health as an infant. Jimmy was not without his critics among fellow Party members on the Native Republic issue, some of whom described it as a form of 'Garveyism'. There also appears to have been animosity between himself and T.W. Thibedi, who felt that he had a more justifiable claim to the position of General Secretary.⁴⁸ In the end, the family returned to Cape Town. The following year brought mixed fortunes to Jimmy la Guma. The Comintern's sixth congress resolved that the Native Republic thesis was the correct approach for South Africa, vindicating his position.⁴⁹ However, during the general election that year he was expelled from the Party because he canvassed for a candidate who opposed the CPSA candidate Douglas Wolton. Jimmy's actions puzzled his contemporaries. Simons and Simons described Jimmy's actions as 'an unexplained lapse', but offered no further explanation.⁵⁰ Readmitted two years later, Jimmy's autocritique in *Umsebenzi* described his actions as 'a serious violation of Party discipline' that 'revealed political opportunism'. Since Lenin regarded opportunism as 'Bolshevism's principal enemy within the working-class movement', this was a significant admission for someone whose attachments to Lenin and the Soviet Union were so important.⁵¹

Jimmy la Guma may have been 'intensely proud of his proletarian birth', but the La Guma family was not working class in a strict sense.⁵² He had already edited ICU publications, would later edit *The Liberator*, a journal of the National Liberation League of South Africa (NLL) and held the position of secretary in a succession of organisations. In addition, his 'day jobs' such as insurance sales clerk and supervisor suggest a petit bourgeois family background, but with an economic

and ideological 'downward identification' towards the working class that took a progressive form.⁵³

As Richard Rive has reminded us, the inhabitants of District Six were aware that it was a slum and that the people who found it romantic were not forced to live there. By 1932, when La Guma was seven, neglect by local government and private landlords meant that many District Six residents lived in dilapidated buildings with inadequate sanitation. In that year *The Sun* reported on conditions that forced a family into a 'small room, with rattling doors and windows, floors rotting and plaster falling', and with 'sanitary arrangements...for an ordinary family being shared by about ten families'.⁵⁴ With two children and few relatives, the La Guma family unit was relatively small. Like most District Six residents, they rented their home. Survey maps of the period and La Guma's own reminiscences show that 1 and 3 Roger Street were part of a terraced housing scheme with its own small yard and shared sanitary lane, not a tenement accommodating several families.⁵⁵ The La Guma family was thus part of the relatively privileged 24% of District Six who did not share their dwelling with anyone else. By 1958, the family had moved out, and that year Jimmy made it available to the South African Coloured Peoples Organisation for its campaign to elect Piet Beyleveld to parliament under the Separate Representation of Voters Act. Given the lack of interest in their properties which most landlords of District Six showed, it is unlikely that their house changed in any way. Alf Wannenburg's impressions of it in 1958 probably applied to it in La Guma's childhood. According to Wannenburg,

It was right on the road. It had a narrow stoep....If anything, the stoep was actually a couple of inches lower than the pavement, and it had a wooden railing in the front...painted that PWD [Public Works Department] brown, reddish brown... and the window of that front room faced on to that little balcony....You went in the [front] door and there was a long passage. You could go into the front room, you could continue and there was a room that ran into a room, from which there was another room on the left hand side,

and then the kitchen, and I think that you went through the kitchen to get into the yard... There was an outside bathroom and an outside toilet... and I think there were only three other rooms...⁵⁶

In February 1966 the area was declared under the Group Areas Act.⁵⁷ There are no site or ground plans for the property.

Often surrounded by poverty and overcrowding, the La Guma family's relative privacy and affluence established a divide between home and public space that confirmed their cultural, though not necessarily economic, position within the coloured petit bourgeoisie. The La Guma home was cleaner, more hygienic and more spacious than the tenement building which Richard Rive described as his family's home, but not so far removed from the homes described in the Medical Officer of Health's 1933 survey of overcrowding in central Cape Town. This survey criticised landlords who made no repairs and did not monitor overcrowding, which was exacerbated by tenants 'of a dirty or careless type'.⁵⁸ Identifying in different ways with the petit bourgeoisie and the working class, in the politically and culturally aware La Guma home cleanliness became a mark of difference in an area characterised by what La Guma later described as 'a constant atmosphere of bad smells against which [his] parents waged a stubborn battle often diverted to the mouse and bedbug front'.⁵⁹ At least one critic has pointed out that in his fiction La Guma 'makes a direct appeal to the reader's sense of smell as much to his visual and auditory senses'.⁶⁰ La Guma's sense of the area as always dirty can be gauged by the way in which he marked his copy of *District Six* by Bruce Franck, George Manuel and Denis Hatfield, a book that he could only have read in exile and which preceded the autobiographical pieces on which much of this analysis is based. On page one there are Xs in the margins against those passages which stated that from its inception District Six had no 'street cleaners. The Press reported neglected courts and thoroughfares filled with rubbish', and that in 1867 'parts of it were already overcrowded and dirt-strewn, conditions which were born in 1835, after the slaves

had been emancipated.’⁶¹ Clearly personal and domestic cleanliness could not keep the sight and smell of decay at bay:

My first recollection of life seems to have been an alleyway. It faced the front window of our house and it was always piled with overflowing dustbins that left most of their contents behind in pools of stagnant water, so that we breathed a horrible odour of decay all the time.⁶²

By contrast, his grandmother’s ‘tiny parlour’,

was cool and shadowy. The light fell here and there on the crowded furniture: the worn sofa with the springbok-hide mat before it; the crocheted antimacassars on the chairs; on the cane hall-stand. There were two glass domes containing two stuffed parrots on the hall-stand, as well as a motley of Victorian bric-a-brac.⁶³

This interior was clean, and his grandmother reminded him of this. “‘Now don’t spill your ginger-pop on the floor, I polished this morning’”, she told him.⁶⁴ As the La Guma’s internal and private world, the home was the ‘purified domain’, but there was no defence against the pervasive invisible ‘invasion’ of smell.⁶⁵

School years brought increased access to the shops, houses and the streets of District Six as his absences from home brought him closer to the world of his father, and to politics. Population increases and wider developments meant that District Six was undergoing social and demographic changes as African and coloured peasants and labourers moved into the cities in search of work. Between 1921, when Jimmy started work in Cape Town as the ICU’s Assistant General Secretary, and 1936, when his son was 11 and the Native Land Act was passed, the urban proportion of the total coloured population rose from 46% to 54%. Between 1921 and 1940 the white population of municipal Ward 7, often regarded as synonymous with District Six, declined from 3 882 to 1 376, while its black population rose from 10 627 to 15

386. Consequently by the early thirties there would have been signs that the population of District Six was increasing and becoming more homogenous in racial terms.⁶⁶ What may be surprising in this context is La Guma's failure to reflect the presence of some 175 African families resident in District Six. At least five families lived in Roger Street and several families were in the streets surrounding Roger Street.⁶⁷ By 1932, the majority of men in District Six were labourers or skilled tradesmen, but the area also contained a relatively small group of professionals who were 'striving against the prejudice that is based on colour only'.⁶⁸ When Ralph Bunche visited Cape Town, a leading member of this group was aware of 10 doctors, one dentist, one architect, one lawyer and three qualified nurses, though there were many religious ministers and teachers.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, their presence contributed to the image of the area's cultural and economic diversity.

He threatened to disrupt the proceedings

La Guma has provided only one description of his relationship with his mother during infancy. Wilhelmina had a good singing voice, and she often sang at charity events. On one occasion she left the infant La Guma in the audience so that she could perform a song on stage. According to La Guma he 'threatened to disrupt the proceedings...should his mother leave him' so Jimmy, who also had a good voice, 'deputised for her on stage'.⁷⁰ On one level, this is nothing more than a demonstration of the infant's deep attachment to his mother, but it also has four significant aspects. Firstly, it suggests the nature of the relationship between his father and mother. In that way it contributes to La Guma's model of masculinity, for it conforms to what Chodorow describes as the 'positional' rather than the potentially more satisfying 'personal identification' with the father. Consequently La Guma was on the road to identification with a 'fantasied masculine role because', given his father's long absences in the Soviet Union, and on speaking tours of South Africa in the mid 1930s and his attendance at meetings, 'the reality constraint that contact with his father would provide [was] missing'.⁷¹ However, if La Guma was identifying with an abstract role model rather than a specific individual, he might still

repeat aspects of his father's behaviour. Secondly, this is an autobiographical piece about the conditions of language acquisition and its creative use while La Guma was at a preverbal stage, because it shows him receiving attention through voice. Later parts of the thesis will explore this in more detail. Thirdly, it suggests that his mother had skills and abilities which motherhood and conventional gender relations prevented her from exercising in public. Based on an interpretation of La Guma's own writings I shall be arguing later that in a subsequent and more socially aware stage of his childhood, his mother made an important contribution to his political education though the basic terms of her relationship with Jimmy remained unaltered. Fourthly, it reveals the formation of Oedipal relations within the La Guma family as it was then. Later I shall argue that the Oedipal relations were reaffirmed as the family changed.

We can interpret La Guma's disruption of the proceedings through what Melanie Klein terms 'oral impulses and fears' as the expression of his anxiety that he would lose the most important figure in his fragile and unformed world. Klein calls these important figures "'internal" or "inner" objects'...In the baby's mind, the "internal" mother is bound up with the "external" one, of whom she is a "double", though one which at once undergoes alterations'.⁷² This early preverbal phase is characterised by a process of 'symbolic equation' in which internal and external objects are doubles and cannot be separated. Later this gives way to the stage of 'symbolism proper' in which the subject can see the relationship between representations and that which they represent.⁷³

While Klein's work in this area did not lead her to develop theories of language and language acquisition in infants, on the basis of her work it is possible for us to establish some of their elements. Acquiring the capacity to recognise visually and aurally the relationships between a number of similar representations on the one hand and that which they represent on the other hand appears to be an important precondition on the part of the infant for the capacity to recognise and deploy, whether consciously or unconsciously, categories such as identity and difference or metaphor and metonymy, and to resist separation from his mother and all that this

had come to represent for him or her, namely 'love, goodness and security'.⁷⁴ These experiences establish the framework for the Oedipal crisis and its resolution.

Schematically, its resolution establishes the father as the mother's sexual partner in preference to the son. Fear of castration by the father should he seek to occupy the latter's place in relation to the mother prompts the son to occupy the same position as his father in relation to another woman. The boy's fear of castration, in this case fear of the signifier of an identity based on a metonymic association between the phallus and the father figure, leads him to relinquish both his desire for the mother and his desire to replace her in relation to the father. On this basis, the male child develops the desire to emulate the father in relation to another woman. Thus, the young La Guma would have been experiencing the immediate loss of his mother as the symptom of a second, deeper and more sustained separation from her that coincided with the confirmation of his father as a powerful inner object with whom he already had the basis of a 'positional' rather than a 'personal' identification. This provides the conditions for language acquisition by enabling the subject to establish relations of identity, difference and similarity through the internal objects and symbols provided by the relationships that characterised his immediate family. For the infant La Guma then, the cluster of internal objects that came to represent Jimmy as a father was based in part on his immediate absence and his presence to a wider public.

The young boy's fear of losing his mother and the resolution of the Oedipal relation depends upon the sublimation and resolution of 'libidinal phantasies' about the mother through the transition from symbolic equation to symbolism proper, i.e. his capacity to replace her with symbols and then to replace those symbols with other symbols. However, the process of symbolic equation generates 'the severest anxiety' within the infant, because as he identifies external objects with the world of inner objects that he has already established, he also symbolically destroys them. This destructive impulse generates an anxiety and dread which leads him to equate that which he wishes to destroy with other things. In turn these become 'objects of anxiety' which must also be replaced with other objects. Thus he must constantly

'make other and new equations, which form the basis of his interest in new objects and symbols'.⁷⁵ According to Klein,

... not only does symbolism come to be the foundation of all phantasy and sublimation but, more than that, upon it is built up the subject's relation to the outside world and to reality in general... As the ego develops, a true relation to reality is gradually established out of this unreal reality. Thus, the development of the ego and the relation to reality depend on the degree of the ego's capacity at a very early period to tolerate the pressure of the earliest anxiety situations. And, as usual, it is a question of a certain optimum amount of the factors concerned. A sufficient quantity of anxiety is the necessary basis for an abundance of symbol formation and of phantasy; an adequate capacity on the part of the ego to tolerate anxiety is necessary if it is to be satisfactorily worked over and if this basic phase is to have a favourable issue and the development of the ego to be successful.⁷⁶

La Guma's adult recollections of oral impulses in a phase of 'symbolic equation' and its transition to symbolism proper helps us to understand how and why La Guma became a writer and activist like his father through a process which depended upon and hid the contribution to his formation as a storyteller and writer of his mother – that object for which there was initially no symbolic equation – that set in motion and managed that 'sufficient quantity of anxiety'.

An aggregate of indications

The story 'The Picture in the Parlour' contains the adult La Guma's recollections and representations of a period slightly later than this. It contributes further dimensions to his sense of his own emergence as political activist and writer. The 'picture' refers to the poster of Lenin which his father brought back from the Soviet Union. Initially it hung above the bed which the family shared in Minnie's house, where Ray Alexander first saw it.⁷⁷ However, while the title refers to one picture

there were actually two – his maternal grandfather and Lenin – and it is the relationship between them and that is significant:

On the wall of the parlour was a big, old-fashioned photograph in a gilt frame of my grandfather. I had never seen him alive, but he seemed to see everybody who passed through the parlour because he watched sternly from his place on the papered wall, his eyes sharp and a little curious, with his white sidewhiskers bristling and his bearded chin as hard as a plank above the starched rampart of his high collar.⁷⁸

Lenin was described in different terms. He had no stern gaze or stiff clothing that acted as barrier between himself and the world. Lenin's picture

was of a man in an ordinary cloth cap and a somewhat wrinkled suit, who stood on what looked like a cobblestoned quay on the bank of a river, with towers in the background. He had one hand in a trouser pocket and he seemed to be looking intently into the future. He did not have sidewhiskers like my grandfather, nor the high, hard collar. Instead, a little pointed beard above an ordinary shirt.⁷⁹

Despite the apparent ordinariness of its subject, this picture was different from and more important than the picture of the grandfather. It was in colour and its frame and glass 'were dusted and cleaned regularly'.⁸⁰ Beneath these portraits in the 'purified domain' of the home the grandmother sat in a chair, and below her on the floor was the young La Guma whom she supplied with 'regular doses of ice-cream mixed with ginger-pop, a mixture for which she herself had a strong weakness'.⁸¹ The juxtaposition of these portraits and the grandmother's association with Merriman, described earlier in the chapter, suggests that this story has many of the elements associated with what Freud describes as the 'family romance'.⁸²

In the family romance, the child fulfils erotic and ambitious aims by replacing his parents in his imagination, particularly his father, with a figure of higher status or importance.⁸³ The first stage of the romance is asexual and unconscious, and its specific features depend on the child's imagination and the material available to it. This applies to the role of Lenin in relation to Jimmy. However, in the second sexually aware stage the child manifests an 'intense sexual curiosity' about its mother that is expressed through the 'desire to bring his mother...into situations of secret infidelity and into secret love-affairs'.⁸⁴ In the extended absences of his orphaned father and the relative absence of his mother, the young Alex expressed his 'family romance' through the incident involving Merriman and his grandmother. However, the child's primary aim in these substitutions is a utopian desire to restore the days when its parents were perfect, and there were some indications from this period, though La Guma would only be aware of this later, that his father's political behaviour was not always ideal. In August 1931, a month after he had been readmitted into the CPSA, he served a seven-day sentence for his part in a Garment Workers' Union strike. The sentencing magistrate compared his conduct to a 'captain deserting his sinking ship'.⁸⁵

Written from the emotional and physical perspective of a child who was always looking upwards at adults and at photographs of adults as symbols of origin, authority and absence, this romance associates nurturance and oral satisfaction with political authority and moral integrity. In the absence of both his own father and his father's father La Guma links the idealised father figure of Lenin to an extended family. This is indicated by the fact that the young La Guma calls Lenin an 'Uncle'. In addition to its conventional meaning, in the South African context the word is also a term with which a child might respectfully address an older man. These two meanings blur the distinction between community and extended family. At the same time it suggests that for the orphaned and expelled Jimmy, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union fulfilled the function of an ideal family, and that the *pater familias* Lenin became its metonymic symbol. This has two consequences. Firstly, the processes which guided symbolic equation and its transition to symbolism proper in

Jimmy's political and family life, a locus for the intersection and interaction of inner and outer worlds, also politicised the transition between symbolic equation and symbolism proper in the life of his son. Secondly, it enables us to recognise a continuity between La Guma's childhood longings and his adult political discourse, for La Guma's description of the development of his political consciousness is motivated by nostalgia – the desire to remove 'the gap between nature and culture' – in order to effect 'a return to the utopia of biology and symbol' as one entity.⁸⁶

During this period, his mother still worked at the cigarette factory and his father was always away 'at what were called "meetings"'. The household appears to have been dominated by his grandmother's presence. She looked after him.⁸⁷ This may account for the fact that he mentions his grandmother's appearance, but not his mother's. With her 'stern but wide and kindly' face she 'ruled over the household and the parlour' like 'a dark version of Queen Victoria, and as 'a mahogany version of Queen Victoria'.⁸⁸ She appears in 'Etude', La Guma's second published short story, through the 'dark' face of the pianist on whose wall hung a picture of Queen Victoria, simultaneously establishing a contrast between the values of culture, respectability and social obligation on the one hand, and the chaotic individualism of District Six's lumpen proletariat on the other, which La Guma as narrator, author and political activist sought to mediate.⁸⁹

The representation of the grandmother and Lenin were also associated with nurturance, indulgence, transgression and punishment. As a small boy with a 'fondness for lead soldiers and a supreme dislike for haircuts', he played beneath the portraits of Lenin and his grandfather at the feet of his grandmother. She supplied them both with 'regular doses of ice-cream and ginger-pop'.⁹⁰ However, no food is neutral or without significance, and according to Lyth ice-cream is a prime example of a 'pleasure food', i.e. a food 'used not primarily for nutrition but for increase of pleasure and reduction of pain, particularly in internal interpersonal relationships'. It has a 'symbolic closeness to the breast and the mother-child relationship'.⁹¹ In this adult representation of his childhood associated with his grandmother, ice-cream and Lenin, Wilhelmina provided La Guma with what we might regard as an

appropriately childlike representation of a Lenin who would remove poverty so that “all the children [could] have ice-cream and ginger pop”.⁹² In this way Lenin becomes the condition for the experience of continued and transgressive pleasure in at least three ways associated with the breast in the absence of both the real mother and the real father. Firstly, there is the guilty pleasure associated with eating ice-cream in the absence of the real mother, whom ice-cream replaces, making her redundant and generating guilt. Support for this can be found in the much later *A Soviet Journey* where he describes the large quantity of ice-cream with which he is presented at an Irkutsk ice-cream factory as ‘a sort of punishment for my childhood indulgence’.⁹³ The second transgression involves the story of his beautiful, oriental grandmother and Merriman – the family romance – with which this chapter has already dealt. Thirdly, there is the fear of transgressing the boundary between the dirty world outside the house and the inner ‘purified domain’ by spilling or making a mess with ‘ginger-pop’ – that other pleasure food. Support for this can be found in his grandmother’s admonition that he should not make a mess because she had recently cleaned the floor.⁹⁴

Further analysis of this last aspect suggests that his grandmother embodies some of the qualities that Klein attributes to the infant superego, particularly ‘overindulgence and excessive severity existing side by side’, that is made up of past ‘experiences and phantasies’ based on preceding internalisations or introjections of his parental figures.⁹⁵ This contributed to the formation of a maternal object that complements and challenges the power of the absent father and Lenin – his metonymic substitute. Later La Guma would describe powerful women in *A Walk in the Night* (Miss Gypsey), *And a Threefold Cord* (Ma Pauls and Missus Nzuba), *In the Fog of the Seasons’ End* (Maria) and *Time of the Butcherbird* (Mma Tau) in similar terms, though he would never ascribe to them his grandmother’s reputed beauty.

La Guma’s reminiscences from the period also help us to understand how he formulated gender roles. According to Craib, since ‘the father is almost always in some sense “absent”’ as a result of the sexual division of labour, the son becomes ‘to

some extent a substitute for the father'; consequently the relationship between the son and mother, is 'sexualised from a very early stage'. However, Craib's analysis requires some modification in La Guma's case, for Craib appears to have in mind a nuclear family with a working father and a stay-at-home mother. In the La Guma's case, he was looked after by his grandmother while his father and mother worked. On this basis it is possible to argue that his relationship with his mother and grandmother was sexualised from an early age. At the same time the construction of a conventional masculine gender identity depends on the little boy's identification with an 'image of masculinity' in the absence of his father. The corollary of this analysis is that 'the little girl is inhibited in her growth towards relative independence by a special identification...between herself and her mother'. This process, in which she is 'neither left behind nor integrated into adulthood', also served to differentiate La Guma from his sister Joan, who appears to have followed in the relatively apolitical footsteps of her mother.⁹⁶ This implies that for the little boy early gender identification depends more upon a sense of what he is not, than upon what he is. In La Guma's case, his father was absent because he was a follower of Lenin, so that the portrait of Lenin was simultaneously a signifier of his father as an image of masculinity and a signifier of his father's absence. At the same time, as a representation, the portrait signified the absences of Lenin and of Jimmy's own family. In part, therefore, La Guma's 'image of masculinity' was premised upon absence, while his image of femininity was premised upon the partial absences of his mother and the continual presence of his grandmother as internal objects that were sometimes severe, sometimes indulgent, sometimes beautiful.

There is evidence of the contribution of women from outside the family to his earliest political experiences and education. During this period outside the CPSA Jimmy remained politically active. He participated in a campaign against Pirow's proposed amendments to the Riotous Assemblies Act organised by the ANC, ICU and CPSA in 1929.⁹⁷ Part of the campaign included a march on 'Dingaan's Day' (16 December) as it was then known, in which Dora Alexander, sister of Ray Alexander,

carried the four-year-old La Guma 'shoulder high, waving the black, green and gold colours of the ANC' down Adderley Street.⁹⁸ According to Roux:

...straw figures of Smuts and Hertzog... were duly committed to the flames at a monster meeting on the Grand Parade. Banners demanded "No taxation without representation" and "Down with Pirow's Bills!" The city officials refused to permit the procession, but in spite of this, over 1,000 marched with band and banners through the main streets – thus defying the authorities... There was only one European in the procession, though two or three had attended the meeting.⁹⁹

Jimmy would almost certainly have been more heavily involved in the campaign if he had not been expelled from the CPSA, yet despite his temporary separation from the CPSA it is significant that the young Alex was not on his father's shoulders – it is very unlikely that his mother would have attended – but on the shoulders of a woman whose family has been closely associated with progressive political and trade union work in South Africa. In symbolic, psychological and literal terms women carried Alex la Guma into politics.

La Guma's adult representations of the origins of his political awareness establish links between absent and present father figures. They merge with notions of community, morality and transgression, and scenes of overindulgent nurturance and severity. La Guma's return to these childhood scenes and their associations as a way of explaining his own political project suggests that his mother and grandmother played a far more important role in his literary and political work than previous studies have acknowledged. It also suggests that nostalgia, a desire for the impossible repetition of an internal maternal object that would make the subject whole, was a powerful factor in the evolution of Alex la Guma as writer and political activist.

Most critics who acknowledge the links between La Guma's literary and political work have pointed to Jimmy as a major influence and inspiration, but

despite La Guma's references to her in short autobiographical pieces and in Abrahams' book, there has been little attempt to assess or interpret the limits and possibilities of Wilhelmina's influence upon her son.¹⁰⁰ La Guma himself has contributed to this oversight. He writes that his father tolerated his wife's 'religious susceptibilities' that led her to insist that their children should be christened. By contrast, Jimmy 'made a point of educating his children in the spirit of materialism, hoping that they would follow in his footsteps'.¹⁰¹ In one of his interviews with Abrahams, La Guma states that Jimmy influenced his 'philosophical and political outlook', and directed him 'towards serious works, both political and cultural'. By contrast Wilhelmina, 'like all mothers', was concerned with preventing the family 'from dying of starvation', and 'with food, clothes and so on'.¹⁰² As indicated earlier, the priorities for father and mother in these representations are clear – ideas and public politics for the father and material necessities, respectability and the private home for the mother.

However, none of this suggests how or why he eventually experienced a desire to tell stories or to write. The little information that La Guma provided about his mother and the fact that on at least two occasions he repeated it suggests that aspects of psychoanalytic theory could provide a useful theoretical framework for its interpretation. Read from perspectives that draw on Freudian and Kleinian theory, La Guma's texts about his childhood suggest a good deal about Wilhelmina's role in the development of her son's literary and political work. La Guma's stories about his childhood contain stories within these stories. Some of these are told by his grandmother and mother. In these stories within stories they are present in and contribute to his early experiences and political lessons about class struggle and racial segregation. They also contributed to his ability and need to retell these and other stories. Here modifications of the central Freudian notion of the 'primal scene' seem particularly useful.

The two recollections in question operate as 'political scenes' analogous to Freud's conception of the 'primal scene', while simultaneously retaining elements of the primal scene itself. For Freud, the 'primal scene' represents the child's phantasy

that he has witnessed sexual intercourse between his parents. It plays a significant part in resolution of the Oedipal relation in the son. In applying this concept to La Guma's formative political experiences, two aspects are relevant. Firstly, the primal scene is a 'retrospective phantasy', because in it the subject relocates an 'imaginary trauma', in this case the phantasy of witnessing sexual intercourse between his parents, from an older to a younger stage in his life. In this sense, as I indicated earlier, there may be several resolutions of the Oedipal relation. Secondly, material associated with the primal scene does not emerge as a simple memory, but has to be 'constructed...from an aggregate of indications'.¹⁰³ This suggests that if the primal scene consists of a combination of true experiences and phantasies, so too may the constitution and resolution of the Oedipal relation.

The conditions for Wilhelmina's contribution lay with the La Guma's economic position. They were not so poor that they had to send their children out to work, and though the grandmother looked after Alex when Wilhelmina worked, Wilhelmina was less absent than Jimmy. Therefore the young La Guma's first political lessons came from his grandmother and mother who told him that his father was a 'follower of Lenin'. The important position that the Lenin picture occupied led La Guma to ask his grandmother about this 'uncle'. She told him that Lenin was 'important' because he had done 'good things', while his mother described Lenin as 'the leader of the great change in Russia which had done away with poverty so that people no longer need be poor'.¹⁰⁴ We can only speculate how much of this La Guma understood as a child. It is possible that a six- or seven-year old would have understood the ideas of wealth, poverty and social justice that the story implies. But, as Lejeune's study of adult narratives of childhood indicates, this in turn requires us to question 'the code of autobiographical verisimilitude' which the idea of a simple recollection implies, and to treat the text as a form of fiction characterised by an uneasy relationship between three elements: the simple language of the child's experience, 'the "subconversation"...that represents what the child is thinking without being able to say it', and the value judgements of the child as adult.¹⁰⁵ The simplicity of the story, and the directness with which it establishes class analysis,

oppression and political struggle before all else indicates that it is a primal and a political scene through which La Guma establishes the dominance of the father figure and the law of his politics, but in the *absence* of the real father. On this reading, La Guma uses Lenin to assert the primacy of the father figure but without giving up his own preferred relationship with his mother and grandmother.

By contrast, he associates only his mother with his first direct experience of racially based unequal treatment. This happened when she took him to the circus for the first time sometime between the ages of six and eight.¹⁰⁶ La Guma found the approach to the tent past the caged animals, bunting and music 'incredibly exciting'. However, once inside the big top he found that his outside, his skin colour, did matter. When the show began he did not know what was happening because he only saw the performers from the back. His mother explained to him that they were 'in the seats for "non-Europeans" and that the White people were given the best view of the performances'.¹⁰⁷ This precipitated two significant experiences. He experienced being-turned-away-from and he had the experience of being defined in terms of negativity and absence as a 'non-European'. Segregation trends at the time seem to bear out La Guma's recollections. January 1931 advertisements for circus performances in the *Cape Times* indicate racial segregation, and in 1940 Mr Boswell denied that coloured spectators were treated unfairly at his circus but admitted that box offices were racially segregated and that 'he never did allow, nor would he allow at any time, Non-Europeans to sit cheek by jowl with Europeans... because he had to take into consideration the view and feelings of the European patrons... who attended the circus performance and objected to the mere presence of Non-Europeans'.¹⁰⁸ The repetition of this experience of being-turned-away-from as a scene, i.e. the repetition of a moment in which he sees himself being seen, is clear from his remark that this left him with a sense of sadness for 'a small boy in South Africa who had only seen the backs of clowns'. It was a sadness to which he returned in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, his first novel completed in exile:

'My aunty took me to a circus once when I was a lighty [small boy],' Beukes said. 'I didn't like it. The actors kept their backs to us all the time and you couldn't see anything they were doing. When I asked my aunty why, she told me it was because we were sitting in the segregated Coloured seats and the actors performed mostly for the Whites, even if we paid the same money. I never went to a circus again after that.'¹⁰⁹

In 'The Picture in the Parlour' La Guma wrote that he did not see another circus performance until he visited Moscow in 1968. By this time he like his father, had become a 'follower of Lenin'.¹¹⁰ Family circumstances in the early 1930s, when La Guma has dated this incident, suggests that home and neighbourhood provided him with positive experiences of racial integration among adults, for instance his father's friends and comrades, and white neighbours who 'borrowed rice and sugar' from Wilhelmina.¹¹¹ At the same time, La Guma's immediate and wider world was becoming increasingly segregated and unequal. The proportion of whites living in District Six was steadily declining – from approximately 27% in 1921 to around 8% in 1931 – a period which also saw the introduction of legislation that accelerated urban segregation and divided Africans from coloureds on the basis of relative deprivation and privilege.¹¹² Secondly, he started school in 1932, and there is no doubt that Ashley Street Primary was for coloured children only.

Other developments at this time changed and cemented family dynamics.¹¹³ By the time he was eight, two other events had occurred which would have substantially confirmed family relationships and La Guma's sense of his position in the family: his sister Joan had been born, and he was attending school. No longer the only child, the birth of his sister would also have changed his relationship with his father by creating the conditions for a primal scene phantasy that would have confirmed Jimmy as his mother's partner. According to André Green:

The father is there, both in the mother and the child, from the beginning. More exactly, *between* the mother and child. From the mother's side this is

expressed in her desire for the father, of which the child is the realisation. On the side of the child, everything which introduces the anticipation of a third person, each time that the mother is not wholly present and her devotion to the child is neither total nor absolute... will be, retrospectively, attributable to the father.¹¹⁴

In La Guma's case there was more than one 'third person' for his new sister and his father both came between him and his mother and both confirmed the primacy and presence of the father. Events in his father's life may also have played a part. In 1931 Jimmy was readmitted to the CPUSA, but in the following year he suffered his second expulsion during the Bach-Wolton 'Bolshevik' period, and so was also turned-away-from by his ideal family. Less absent, Jimmy would have come between son and mother more often. It is likely that these events had a similar consequence to the circus scene, for with the new arrival in the home and his departure for school, he would have been turned-away-from by both mother and father.

The Lenin story established his father as a model, but one who did not come between maternal figures and La Guma. In that respect it was simultaneously post- and pre-Oedipal. The circus scene was the moment that resolved and brought together Oedipal and political relations. With separation from the mother reaffirmed, La Guma's increasing exposure to a wider world characterised by politics and racial inequality became a condition of identification with the father. Within the context of a literary and political biography, the circus scene is significant as a story through which the adult La Guma retrospectively establishes difference in the realms of gender and race. The Lenin story and the circus scene both confirm the sexual divisions and hierarchies of labour in the La Guma household. Being aware of the experience of racial discrimination in the early 1930s would have required La Guma to understand notions such as race and racial identity, and to be aware of the idea of socially accepted and socially rejected differences between racial difference and discrimination while living in a home characterised by racial integration but in an area that was increasingly coloured, and in an increasingly segregated city. This is

not impossible for a seven-year old child growing up in a household in which political issues played a large part. However, it seems more likely that these concepts and experiences provided the conditions for a later interpretation by La Guma in which he superimposed the birth of his sister and its consequences onto an event that involved his mother and himself, excluded his father and sister and repeated the experience of being-turned-away-from in a public domain that could be retrospectively politicised, just as the primal scene is a retrospective construction that involves the experience of being-turned-away-from. Thus La Guma became a 'follower of Lenin' in his own way.

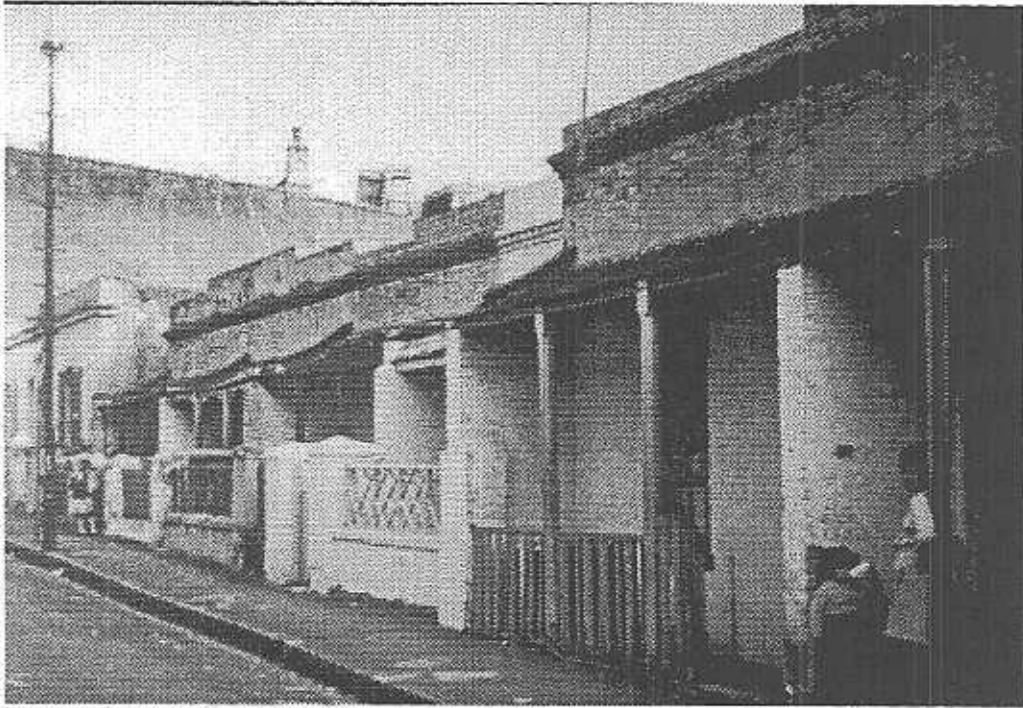


Fig. 1.1: Roger Street at the Tenant Street end, shortly before the demolition of District Six. (Source: G. Fagan)

Endnotes

- ¹ A. la Guma, *Jimmy la Guma: A Biography*, (Friends of the South African Library, Cape Town, 1997), p.51.
- ² G. Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall: A History of South African 'Coloured' Politics* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1987), p. 251.
- ³ C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma* (Twayne, Boston, 1985), p. 3.
- ⁴ Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. 2; A. La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p.17.
- ⁵ Joan Dempers (née La Guma), interview by Mohamed Adhikari, 25 May 1993.
- ⁶ For instance, the Cape Archives contain the death certificates of an unmarried woman, Susan Laguma, who was born in 1867, and Maria Laguma whose husband was Daniel Laguma. Both were from Simonstown.
- ⁷ M. Adhikari, *James La Guma* (Maskew Miller Longman, Cape Town, 1996), p. 2.
- ⁸ *Cape Standard*, 17 January 1939; La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 17.
- ⁹ Joan Dempers, interview; La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, pp. 3, 2.
- ¹⁰ La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 18; Joan Dempers, interview.
- ¹¹ Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, p. 16.
- ¹² La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 18.
- ¹³ La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p.18; *Cape Standard*, 17 January 1939.
- ¹⁴ *Cape Standard*, 17 January 1939; La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, pp. 18-22.
- ¹⁵ La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 22.
- ¹⁶ *Cape Standard*, 17 January 1939; La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 24.
- ¹⁷ *Cape Standard*, 1 March 1938, 17 January 1939; La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 26.
- ¹⁸ R. A. Hill and G.A. Pirio, "'Africa for the Africans': the Garvey movement in South Africa, 1920-1940", in S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa* (Longman, London, 1987), p. 215.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 220-221, 216; La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, pp. 28-30.
- ²⁰ Hill and Pirio, "'Africa for the Africans'", pp. 209, 216, 218.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 215.
- ²² The Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection contains a copy of the *Constitution and Book of Laws* for the UNIA and the African Communities' League of the World, dated 1922.
- ²³ Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, p. 7; A. la Guma, 'The Picture in the Parlour', in *Liberation Chabalala: The World of Alex la Guma* (Mayibuye Press, Bellville, 1993), p. 167; La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 26.
- ²⁴ Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, pp. 57, 12.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 58, 60-61.
- ²⁶ Human Sciences Research Council, *Dictionary of South African Biography* Vol. II (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 1972); La Guma, 'The Picture in the Parlour', p. 167; Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. 2.
- ²⁷ R. R. Edgar (ed.), *An African American in South Africa: The Travel Notes of Ralph J. Bunche* (Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 1992), p. 81.
- ²⁸ Joan Dempers, interview; Adhikari, *James La Guma*, p.16.
- ²⁹ Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, p. 101.
- ³⁰ For the periods 1917-1932 see *Donaldson and Brady's Cape Town and Suburban Directory* (Cape Town); for 1933-1943 see *Cape Times South African Directory* (Cape Times, Cape Town); for 1927-1932 see *Juta's Directory of Cape Town, Suburbs and Simonstown* (Juta, Cape Town); for 1932 see *Dennis Edwards' Cape Town and Suburban Directory* (Cape Town).
- ³¹ Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, p. 186; La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 55.
- ³² Joan Dempers, interview; A. la Guma, 'The Real Picture', in C. Abrahams (ed.), *Memories of Home: The Writings of Alex La Guma* (Africa World Press, Trenton, 1991), p. 15; A. la Guma (pseud. A. Adams), 'Why I Joined the Communist Party', *The African Communist*, no. 47 (1971),

p. 57.

- ³³ S. Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?', in M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (eds), *Woman, Culture and Society* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1974), p. 74.
- ³⁴ Joan Dempers, interview.
- ³⁵ P. L. Wickins, *The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa* (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1978), p. 107.
- ³⁶ La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, pp. 27, 29; B. Bunting, *Moses Kotane: South African Revolutionary* (Inkululeko Publications, London, 1975), p. 29.
- ³⁷ Wickins, *The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa*, p. 114.
- ³⁸ See for instance La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 29; A. Lerumo, *Fifty Fighting Years* (Inkululeko Publications, London, 1980), p. 55 ff.; B. Luckhardt and K. Wall, *Organise... Or Starve!* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1980), p. 43.
- ³⁹ Wickins, *The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa*, p. 107.
- ⁴⁰ I. Goldin, 'The Reconstitution of Coloured identity', in S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa*, p. 164.
- ⁴¹ Hill and Pirio, "'Africa for the Africans'", pp. 232, 234; La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 30.
- ⁴² La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, pp. 31, 33, 42, 36.
- ⁴³ La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 43; A. la Guma, *A Soviet Journey* (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1978), p. 211; Adhikari, *James La Guma*, p. 23.
- ⁴⁴ *The South African Worker*, 30 March 1928; La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, pp. 44, 77; La Guma, 'The Picture in the Parlour', p. 168.
- ⁴⁵ T. Dreiser, *Dreiser Looks at Russia* (Constable, London, 1928); *The South African Worker*, 30 March 1928; La Guma, *A Soviet Journey*, p. 211; W.A. Swanberg, *Dreiser* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1965), p. 331.
- ⁴⁶ Swanberg, *Dreiser*, pp. 339, 330; La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 34; J.M. Coetzee, 'Man's Fate in the Novels of Alex la Guma', in J.M. Coetzee, *Doubling the Point* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1992), p. 345; B. Chandramohan, *A Study in Trans-Ethnicity in Modern South Africa: The Writings of Alex la Guma* (Mellen Research University Press, Lampeter, 1992), p. 31.
- ⁴⁷ La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 48-49.
- ⁴⁸ Ray Alexander, interview by Roger Field, 10 June 1993; Barry Feinberg, interview by Roger Field, 5 May 1993; E. Roux, *Time Longer Than Rope* (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1972), p. 210; E. Roux, *S.P. Bunting: A Political Biography* (Mayibuye Press, Cape Town, 1993), p. 7.
- ⁴⁹ D. Boersner, *The Bolsheviks and the National and Colonial Question* (Librairie E. Droz, Geneva, 1957), p. 267.
- ⁵⁰ B. Schoeman, *Parlementêre Verkiesings in Suid Afrika, 1910-1976* (Aktuele Publikasies, Pretoria, 1977), p. 163; R. Simons and J. Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950* (International Defence and Aid for Southern Africa, London, 1983), pp. 412, 449.
- ⁵¹ *Umsebenzi*, 10 July 1931; V.I. Lenin, "'Left-Wing" Communism - An Infantile Disorder', in V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works* Vol. III (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977), p. 300.
- ⁵² La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 109.
- ⁵³ P. Bonner, 'The Transvaal Native Congress 1917-1920: the radicalization of the black petty bourgeoisie on the Rand', in S. Marks and R. Rathbone (eds), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa* (Longman, London, 1982), p. 272.
- ⁵⁴ R. Rive, 'District Six: Fact and Fiction', in S. Jeppie and C. Soudien (eds), *The Struggle for District Six Past and Present* (Buchu Books, Cape Town, 1990), p. 111; *The Sun*, 2 September 1932.
- ⁵⁵ A. la Guma (pseud. Gala), 'Doing Something Useful', *The African Communist*, no. 89 (1982), p. 49; Thom's Survey Map 1898-1918 (Cape Provincial Administration, Town Planning Dept.); Cape Town City Council, *City Survey*, July 1957.
- ⁵⁶ Alf Wannenburg, interview by Roger Field, 22 May 1998.
- ⁵⁷ N. Barnett, 'Race, Housing and Town Planning in Cape Town, circa 1920-1940' (M.A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1993), p. 128; Cape Town Office of the Master of the Rolls, Plot/Folio

no. 6804.

⁵⁸ Edgar (ed.), *An African American in South Africa*, p. 54; R. Rive, *Writing Black* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1981), p. 5; *The Sun*, 21 April 1933.

⁵⁹ La Guma, 'Doing Something Useful', p. 49.

⁶⁰ S.O. Asein, 'Symbolic Setting in the South African Novel', in S.O. Asein and A.O. Asholu (eds.), *Studies in the African Novel* (Ibadan University Press, Ibadan, 1986), p. 215.

⁶¹ B. Franck, G. Manuel and D. Hatfield, *District Six* (Longmans, Cape Town, 1967), p. 1.

⁶² A. la Guma, 'Why I Joined the Communist Party', *The African Communist*, no. 47 (1971), p. 57.

⁶³ La Guma, 'The Picture in the Parlour', p. 167.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁶⁵ P. Stallybrass and A. White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Methuen, London, 1986), pp. 138-9.

⁶⁶ Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, p. 154; Barnett, 'Race, Housing and Town Planning in Cape Town, circa 1920-1940', p. 180.

⁶⁷ N. Ngcelwane, *Sala Kahle, District Six* (Kwela Books, Cape Town, 1998), pp. 48, 104, 135.

⁶⁸ *The Sun*, 5 January 1934.

⁶⁹ Edgar (ed.), *An African American in South Africa*, p. 80.

⁷⁰ La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 78.

⁷¹ N. Chodorow, 'Family Structure and Feminine Personality', in M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (eds.), *Woman, Culture and Society*, p. 49; La Guma, 'The Picture in the Parlour', p. 168; *The Cape Standard*, 24 January 1938.

⁷² M. Klein, 'Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States', in J. Mitchell (ed.) *The Selected Melanie Klein* (Penguin, London, 1988), pp. 148-149.

⁷³ *Ibid.*; M. Klein, 'The Importance of Symbol Formation in the Development of the Ego', in J. Mitchell (ed.), p. 97; J.-M. Petot, *Melanie Klein*, Vol. I (International Universities Press, Madison, 1988), p. 222.

⁷⁴ Klein, 'Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States', p. 148.

⁷⁵ Klein, 'The Importance of Symbol Formation in the Development of the Ego', p. 97.

⁷⁶ Klein, 'The Importance of Symbol Formation in the Development of the Ego', pp. 97-98.

⁷⁷ Ray Alexander, interview.

⁷⁸ La Guma, 'The Picture in the Parlour', p. 167.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁸² S. Freud, 'Family Romances', in S. Freud, *On Sexuality* (Penguin, London, 1991), pp. 217-226.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 225; D. Musson, *Johnny Gomas: Voice of the Working Class* (Buchu Books, Cape Town, 1989), p. 67; La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 56; *Umsebenzi*, 10 July 1931.

⁸⁶ S. Stewart, *On Longing* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1984), p. 22.

⁸⁷ La Guma, 'The Picture in the Parlour', p. 168; La Guma, 'The Real Picture', p. 18; La Guma, 'Why I Joined the Communist Party' p. 57.

⁸⁸ La Guma, 'The Picture in the Parlour', p. 167; La Guma, 'Why I Joined the Communist Party', p. 57; Dora Nash (née Alexander), interview by R. Field, 3 December 1994.

⁸⁹ A. la Guma (pseud. Eugene Alexander), 'Etude', *New Age*, 24 January 1957.

⁹⁰ La Guma, 'The Picture in the Parlour', p. 167.

⁹¹ I.M. Lyth, 'Pleasure Foods', in *Dynamics of the Social* Vol. II (Free Association Books, London, 1989), pp. 66, 69.

⁹² La Guma, 'The Picture in the Parlour', p. 168.

⁹³ La Guma, *A Soviet Journey*, p. 172.

⁹⁴ La Guma, 'The Picture in the Parlour', p. 167.

⁹⁵ M. Klein, 'Early Stages of the Oedipus Conflict', in J. Mitchell (ed.), *The Selected Melanie*

- Klein, p. 71; M. Klein, 'The Psycho-Analytic Play Technique: Its History and Significance', *Ibid.*, p. 48.
- ⁹⁶ I. Craib, *Psychoanalysis and Social Theory: The Limits of Sociology* (Harvester, New York, 1989), p. 175.
- ⁹⁷ A. Odendaal and R. Field, Introduction, *Liberation Chabalala*, p. vii; E. Roux, *Time Longer Than Rope*, p. 230.
- ⁹⁸ La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 51; Dora Nash, interview.
- ⁹⁹ That 'European' was Edward Roux; see Roux, *Time Longer Than Rope*, pp ix-x, 230.
- ¹⁰⁰ La Guma, 'Why I Joined the Communist Party', pp. 57-58; Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. 5; La Guma, 'The Real Picture', p. 17.
- ¹⁰¹ La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 77.
- ¹⁰² La Guma, 'The Real Picture', pp. 18-19.
- ¹⁰³ S. Freud, 'From the History of an Infantile Neurosis (The "Wolf Man")', in S. Freud, *Case Histories Vol. II* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1979), pp. 294, 285.
- ¹⁰⁴ La Guma, 'The Picture in the Parlour', pp. 168, 167.
- ¹⁰⁵ P. Lejeune, 'The Ironic Narrative of Childhood: Vallès', in *On Autobiography* (University of Minneapolis Press, Minneapolis, 1989), pp. 53, 64.
- ¹⁰⁶ La Guma, 'Why I Joined the Communist Party', p. 58; La Guma, 'The Real Picture', p. 17.
- ¹⁰⁷ La Guma, 'Why I Joined the Communist Party', p. 58.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Cape Times*, 1 January 1931; *Cape Standard*, 31 December 1940.
- ¹⁰⁹ A. La Guma, *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* (Heinemann, London, 1979), p. 40.
- ¹¹⁰ La Guma, 'Why I Joined the Communist Party', p. 58.
- ¹¹¹ La Guma, 'Doing Something Useful', p. 51.
- ¹¹² Barnett, 'Race, Housing and Town Planning in Cape Town, circa 1920-1940', p. 180; Goldin, 'The reconstitution of Coloured identity in the Western Cape', p. 166.
- ¹¹³ La Guma, 'The Real Picture', p. 16; P. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1984), p. 277.
- ¹¹⁴ A. Green, 'The Dead Mother', in A. Green, *On Private Madness* (Hogarth Press, London, 1986), p. 147.

Chapter Two

Brown Sons of Africa

This chapter covers La Guma's life from the early 1930s to the late 1940s. Much of it is taken up with Jimmy's actions and thoughts and their effect on his son. During this period La Guma moves into his father's world of politics, journalism and literature. Jimmy's second expulsion from the CPSA and his involvement in other cultural and political organisations indicates that at times political participation and a sense of political belonging were more important to him than his family at times. It was during this period outside both the Party and the National Liberation League of South Africa that Jimmy made his most significant pronouncements on the need for coloured writers. While Jimmy stressed ethnicity, his son's later reflections on the origins of his own political awareness at this time emphasise the universality of proletarian class consciousness in the works of literary models such as Jack London and Robert Tressell. This chapter draws on psychoanalytic theory to argue that La Guma became like his father by developing his own narrative skills, and that the development of these skills was a key factor in the resolution of the Oedipus Complex, because they enabled him to be the same as yet different from his father.

With school in 1932 came a shift in emphasis from communication that was oral and mother-orientated to the world of his father. The transition from the lore of the mother to the law of the father and its institutionalised settings, particularly school and political organisations, played an important part in the development of La Guma's interests, subject preferences and learning abilities. It required the young La Guma to channel what Klein describes as 'libidinal instinctual energies' in prescribed ways.¹ Far from removing La Guma from situations in which stories were told, these settings increased his exposure to narrative environments.

As we have seen, Wilhelmina had ensured that *her* children were baptised, but Jimmy wished to educate *his* children 'in the spirit of materialism'. Given his

political dominance in the family, it is not surprising that in 1932 La Guma went to Ashley Street Primary, one of five non-denominational coloured schools in District Six at the time.² An anti-clericalism at least as strong as his opposition to the state may not have been the only reason why Jimmy sent his son there. In common with members of the African Peoples Organisation (APO), he may have doubted the impartiality of education at mission schools, because they tended to employ teachers of their denomination. Secondly, mission schools had to overcome a heritage of neglect, underfunding from the state, lack of equipment, overcrowding and unsuitable accommodation that had been a matter of concern to the APO since 1911.³ This does not mean that other schools were much better off. Financial factors may also have contributed to the decision to send La Guma to that school, for while from 1918 the Cape Provincial Administration increased its grants to mission schools for salaries, rent and building costs, these schools still had to make up the shortfall somehow, even if school fees for coloured primary pupils had been abolished in 1928 and from 1930 coloured and white children could receive free education until their fifteenth year.⁴ However, this education was not compulsory, and the fact that La Guma continued beyond primary school and that his sister became a teacher suggests that his family placed a high value on education. When La Guma began school, racially segregated education was firmly entrenched, though coloured and white primary school curricula were similar and secondary schools wrote the same exams. This would change in the forties.⁵ In this respect, La Guma's education contributed to the way in which he saw himself as coloured, and played a part in the development of his views about South Africa and his resistance to apartheid.⁶

The best ideals of the brotherhood of mankind

There is relatively little detail on La Guma's primary school years, but one figure does stand out in his recollections. The collaborative piece between La Guma and Abrahams describes his principal, Mrs Petersen, in terms reminiscent of the

description of his grandmother. It repeats the qualities of the latter's superego function, and adds weight to the idea that the superego is 'built up of identifications dating from very different periods and strata in the mental life'. For La Guma, Mrs Petersen was a 'very strict, severe and nevertheless kind woman who intended to make sure that we would all grow up into decent and honest citizens'.⁷ Though politically conservative, her notion of education clearly went beyond the classroom, and she may have added enjoyment of classical music to La Guma's already musical home life. In 1937, she participated in discussions with the Spes Bona Orchestra Society. These resulted in several thousand coloured school children attending concerts by the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra.⁸

For someone with little formal education, Jimmy la Guma had an impressive command of written and spoken English. This enabled him to hold important positions in a variety of political organisations, to edit their publications and to write articles and letters on their behalf. In addition he monitored the Afrikaans press. On one occasion the organisers of an anti-segregation meeting in Cape Town refused to allow two reporters from the Afrikaans press into the hall. The reporters had allegedly referred to Gomas, La Guma, Cissy Gool and Sam Kahn in a derogatory manner and had distorted and sensationalised the actions of 'progressive men and women, who hold the best ideals of the brotherhood of mankind'.⁹ At this time increasing numbers of Afrikaans-speaking coloureds from rural areas were moving to the District.¹⁰ Jimmy could deliver speeches in German and Afrikaans but it is unlikely that the family spoke much Afrikaans, because the home language of politically aware families, a minority of the District Six population, was English. Jimmy's literary and linguistic abilities provided his son with a model of 'correct' English usage which relatively few families in District Six enjoyed, particularly those with the La Gumas' limited income. Notwithstanding possible peer pressure to speak 'incorrectly', it is likely that the young La Guma would have enjoyed a clear advantage over many of his classmates. One of the findings of a study on written English composition in Standard Six coloured schools in the Cape Peninsula in 1949 gives some idea of the advantage that he enjoyed: 'Judging by the errors made in the

compositions it became quite apparent that many pupils had not been reared in correct speech habits from the earliest years.¹¹

Neither Abrahams nor La Guma mentions the language forms La Guma used to tell his stories. Given his audience and the fact that English was a home language for a minority of District Six residents, it is likely that if La Guma held his audience's attention he used language forms with which they were familiar. Consequently, like many of his contemporaries he would have been able to speak in, and switch between, standard English and Afrikaans, vernaculars based in English or Afrikaans, and 'most important,' as McCormick suggests, be 'able to sense when to use which code'.¹² A necessary condition for social interaction *and* performative storytelling, this code-switching facility would also contribute to the manner in which he articulated and represented coloured identity in his journalism and fiction. It probably also led the writer of his *Sechaba* obituary to note that he 'loved mimicking the mannerisms and jargon of the Cape Coloured working class. This he did out of sheer love and togetherness with them.'¹³ Thus the form and content of his early stories contributed directly to his later work.

His high level of competence in the English language does not explain how or why he told stories or became interested in creative writing. If the previous chapter indicated that a complete answer to the question may be impossible, here we can suggest additional factors that may have created the conditions out of which the writer could later emerge. Writing in different contexts, Klein refers to 'different periods and strata' and draws on a 'geological' metaphor to describe the superego, while writing about himself La Guma stresses Mrs Petersen's concern with moral foundations. In La Guma's case, the ability to construct narratives derived from contact with maternal figures. This suggests that the experiences of storytelling helped to repair the emotional damage caused by the sense of neglect associated with the circus scene, for he recalls that he had an ability to tell stories to his school friends "'almost at will'". This made him popular, and enabled him to "'command their attention'".¹⁴ From displaced and turned-away-from onlooker he has become the 'good' and self-empowering performer who could 'command...attention' almost

whenever he desired. At the same time, since the circus scene contributed to the resolution of Oedipal conflicts within the family it enabled La Guma to adopt the position of the father, for it is clear from the *Biography* that Jimmy enjoyed telling stories about his travels, adventures and political encounters. In part La Guma could become like his father by telling stories. Thus the act of telling stories became a way of recalling and repairing experiences of loss, of consolidating his gender identity, of affirming his place in his family and in the world.

For La Guma, the *experience* of storytelling could only be reparative if it repeated and involved a transgression of the boundaries between the lore of the mother and the law of the father. This transgression of boundaries was an acknowledgement that both father and mother had contributed to his emergence as a storyteller. Here Freud's analysis of his grandson's '*fort/da*' game in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' offers some useful insights.¹⁵ In the '*fort/da*' game Freud observed his grandson's 'occasional disturbing habit' of throwing away small objects and then effecting their return. According to Freud, this was accompanied by two sounds that 'represented the German word "*fort*" ["gone"]' and 'a joyful "*da*" ["there"]' to describe the departure and return of the object respectively. Freud interprets this as a clear example of the grandson's 'renunciation of instinctual satisfaction' precipitated by his mother's departures which the young grandson accommodates 'by himself staging the disappearance and return of the objects within his reach'.¹⁶ If this form of compensation associates pleasure with the return, then the infant's other deployment of the game becomes a way of dealing with the perceived original cause of the mother's absences – the father's presence. Freud writes that the infant 'had no desire to be disturbed in his sole possession of his mother', but was powerless to prevent it. Here the infant expresses 'hostile impulses by throwing away objects instead of persons'. In both cases the child occupies what Freud describes as 'a *passive* situation – he was overpowered by the experience; but by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was...he took on an *active* part', and so was able to accommodate it.¹⁷

Classroom experiences also provided some positive reinforcement for storytelling. Some of his essays 'were read out in the class', and teachers said that he had 'a certain talent for writing'. In effect, the teacher commanded La Guma's attention to the attention that he himself could command. La Guma was exposed to the possibility that certain activities or occupations associated with language and narrative could provide him with a variety of pleasures – including a special status.¹⁸ In La Guma's case language and writing skills also mediated the division between public and private spheres. Consequently, they were also associated with the sexual division of labour in the home, and with comparisons between his mother and father. Responsible as she was for the annual spring cleaning, it was his mother who threw out the exercise books containing the 'type of stories that a schoolboy would write'.¹⁹ Through the 'healthy' sublimation of drives La Guma was becoming a (pro)creator like his father. He did this by adapting the experiences of the primal and political scenes associated with his mother to literary and graphic forms of expression.²⁰ At least one of his father's contemporaries recalls that as a boy Alex 'always had a pencil in his hand' for writing or drawing.²¹

Let us fight to be free!

In 1932 Jimmy was expelled from the CPSA for a second time. He was one of many loyal activists who suffered this fate during the 'left' period associated with Bach and Wolton. At this time he worked for an engineering firm.²² However he could not remain politically inactive, and unsuccessfully tried to start a branch of the League Against Imperialism.²³ When this failed he turned his attention to the Cape Literary and Debating Society (CLDS) and the Fifteen Group. Both gave him the opportunity to engage with issues he valued.

The CLDS met on a monthly basis and encouraged debate on a wide range of issues. Jimmy spoke at several meetings on topics such as 'That Western Civilisation is Failing' and 'The entry of women into politics and industry is detrimental to society', and he won.²⁴ The Society's political and cultural significance for Jimmy can be judged by the fact that it organised several intersociety debates on political

topics. These included a debate with the Cape Fabian Society on the National Question, and meetings with the Lenin Club, the Socialist Club and the Socialist Party.²⁵ Jimmy took part in the Society's first interdebate competition with the University of Cape Town Debating Society, 'the very first occasion on which a non-European Debating Society had ever been entertained by them'. He and his teammate S. Maurice spoke in favour of the topic 'Democracy has Failed'. Jimmy argued that 'The education of the masses has not been brought about by democracy, but by the needs of modern industry. The upper classes were driven to educate the working class, for this age of machinery demands at least partially educated attendants.' They won.²⁶ Not all debates were settled in a 'civilised' manner. When the CLDS debated the topic 'The salvation of the Coloured people lies exclusively with Socialism' with the Socialist Club, the Socialists lost the debate by a narrow margin, audience members fought and the police were called in.²⁷ In contrast to his active role in debates, he does not appear to have participated in the Society's cultural activities such as its anniversary dances. Since he was willing to attend formal social events organised by trade unions, his contact with the Society and its members may have been determined by his own needs for a public forum and his sceptical attitude towards those whom he felt did not share his political views or proletarian background.²⁸

During this time Jimmy's membership of the Fifteen Group exposed his son to more overtly political issues and debates, and brought even more political discussion into a home life dominated by politics. A discussion group founded by Christian Ziervogel, the Fifteen Group consisted of 'the most brilliant young [coloured] men' in District Six, though at 44 Jimmy could hardly be described as young. [Fig. 2.1] The Fifteen Group aimed to give its members the opportunity to study, discuss practical problems with each other and listen to occasional lectures by invited experts.²⁹ One of the Group's earliest public events was a talk at the newly opened Hyman Liberman Centre in District Six by Professor Brown, a visiting American sociologist. Brown noted 'the drift of the Coloured races into adopting European life and culture', and expressed surprise at the apparent docility of black South

Africans in view of the oppression they experienced.³⁰ The emphasis on politically informed intellectual discussion was not necessarily its undoing, but it did create tensions that led to its dissolution. At the end of 1934 the Group dissolved because 'the persistence of a minority turned all discussions on to one topic, namely, communism'. Split into two factions, the Fifteen Circle and the Fifteen Group, the Circle continued to use the Liberman Institute as its venue, and appears to have moved away from political issues towards self-help projects such as training for public speakers. The new Fifteen Group was denied use of the Liberman. So it was that in November 1934, the year in which the Wilcocks Commission was appointed to look into coloured affairs, Jimmy drew together members of the former Fifteen Group such as John Gomas, Abdurasiet Brown and John Paulsen for meetings in the backyard of his Roger Street home. These gatherings eventually led to the formation of the National Liberation League of South Africa.³¹

Just over a year after those backyard meetings, the National Liberation League of South Africa (NLL) opened its offices at 1 Longmarket Street. This was near the corner of Tennant and Hanover Streets, close to the La Guma home. With 36% of Cape Town's residential areas racially mixed in 1936, the NLL made its appearance when segregation legislation, job reservation and moves to disenfranchise Africans coincided with the Spanish Civil War and the rise of fascism in Europe and South Africa.³² Jimmy was elected to the post of General Secretary at the NLL's inaugural conference in March 1936, and for the next three years was heavily involved in the organisation, often spending time away from home. In 1938, he provided the NLL's official response to the findings of the Wilcocks Commission, thereby explicitly acknowledging the fact that the majority of NLL members saw themselves as coloured. During that year he also acted as the election agent for NLL president Cissie Gool who successfully stood for Ward 7 in the municipal elections.³³ The formation of the NLL appears to have meant a great deal to Jimmy, though it caused his family some financial hardship. He placed the organisation's survival above his family's wellbeing by using the £50 severance pay he had received from earlier work as an insurance salesperson for NLL office furniture and rent. As an office bearer for

the organisation he received little or no pay, and Jimmy's 'income' often took the form of gifts from supporters to his daughter Joan. She would pass them on to Wilhelmina, because Jimmy was 'too proud' to accept money.³⁴

The League's leadership also had its share of internal disputes. One area of contention reflected the differences between supporters of the 'radical' New Era Fellowship (NEF) and the CPSA's 'popular front' approach that Jimmy supported. However, moves to enforce racial residential segregation in the Cape Province united these factions, and prompted the NLL to embark on a mass campaign. In the late 1950s and early 1960s his son would encounter similar divisions over participation in the 1958 elections, and would participate in campaigns against the extension of white minority rule. Jimmy became organising secretary of the Non-European United Front, an umbrella body of some 45 organisations that opposed these moves.³⁵ In March 1939, he chaired the Front's mass meeting of 20 000 people on the Grand Parade that led to a march on parliament and running battles between protesters and the army and police.³⁶ According to Peter Abrahams, who had been involved in its preparations,

[t]hat evening, a monster meeting was held on the parade-ground. The huge ground was packed with dark faces. The atmosphere of tension spread from the Coloured area to the areas of the whites. Police and soldiers were brought out in force. They were armed and made a ring about the monster meeting. Beginning with Cissie Gool, speaker after speaker stirred the vast throng to a new realisation of the misery of their lives in such a fair and pleasant land.... Nowhere else on earth do white people do as little real work and live as well as they do here.... They believe in slavery. Their Pass Laws, their Colour Bar Laws, their Civilised Labour Policy, their taxation without representation, the low wages they give you, the miserable conditions in which they keep you: these are the chains of your slavery. But all their soldiers and all their police cannot keep you there for

ever. Let us tell them that. Let us tell them we have had enough! Let us fight to be free! Dark folks, arise!

And a voice cried:

'TO PARLIAMENT! LET THEM KNOW HOW WE FEEL!'³⁷

This was the high point of the NLL's mass political activity, but that month Jimmy was ousted from the position of general secretary and expelled from the organisation.³⁸ Exactly why he was expelled remains unclear. He opposed Cissie Gool's alleged drift towards the vote-winning but less politically correct welfare programmes and self-help schemes associated with the APO and her father, Dr Abdurahman. More importantly, Jimmy also felt that 'white socialists' exerted a disproportionate influence on the NLL general council, and that a predominantly black organisation should have a predominantly black leadership, though he was not against whites playing an advisory role.³⁹

Jimmy went on to found the short-lived National Development League (NDL), a social and political organisation which was specifically for coloureds and which articulated the need for a specifically coloured identity.⁴⁰ It aimed to encourage 'a spirit of nationalism among the coloured community, to bring about national consciousness and a general upliftment'. Influenced by the Garveyism that had characterised the politics and the ICU and the ANC during the 1920s and 1940s, the NDL would foster 'a spirit of independence and race pride...to mutually assist one another in developing [their] own enterprises and...leadership working in co-operation with other sections of the community, each group retaining its own identity, but all working first in the interests of South Africa and its people.' In Jimmy la Guma's NDL, his earlier exposure to Garveyite notions such as 'race pride' and self-help within the bounds of capitalism combined with notions of an essential coloured identity. Aspects of the latter included the following ideas: that coloureds formed a distinct ethnic or national group; that coloured identity already existed and should be promoted; that coloured mutual assistance programmes established an intrinsic and introspective set of interests and elided class divisions. At

the same time, it also established a broader national interest and purpose, 'South Africa and its people', to which 'each group' should contribute.⁴¹ Ironically the NDL's only reported public event was a concert of 'Coloured talent' that made it appear even less political than the APO or NLL.⁴² The nature of Jimmy's expulsion from the NLL resulted in some bitterness, for he refused to hand over the League's record books, which resulted in legal proceedings against him. This also influenced La Guma's perceptions of Cissie Gool. Nineteen years later – when he wrote for *New Age* on coloured participation in elections after the implementation of the Separate Representation of Voters Act – he recalled that Cissie Gool was 'one-time styled as the Joan of Arc of the Coloured people'. This was a clear and scathing reference to a frequently used newspaper portrait of her simply captioned '*Jeanne d'Arc*'.⁴³ Ironically, as we shall see in Chapter 4, La Guma eventually supported participation in the national elections. This was a position that she opposed.

In the months following his expulsion, and concurrently with moves to set up the NDL, Jimmy stood in the 1939 City Council elections as an independent representative of the working class against APO leader Dr Abdurahman. The contest was hardly clean, for Jimmy insinuated that nepotism and religious prejudice obstructed his chances.⁴⁴ Both the CPSA and the NLL were drawn into the contest. The former rejected La Guma's claim to represent the workers, while the latter expressed its opposition to Dr Abdurahman and to the rival NDL. In the end, Dr Abdurahman won by a substantial majority.⁴⁵ Nor was Jimmy any more successful the following year when he lost the by-election for the same seat precipitated by Dr Abdurahman's death.⁴⁶

Wrested by her from toil

The formation of the NLL ended a brief period of 'conventional' family life for the La Gumas. It also created the conditions which enabled Alex to become like his father. Since the League's offices were very close to the La Guma home, the double absence on which his relationship with his father and his earliest images of masculinity had been based was now simultaneously confirmed and modified.

Attending school and drawn into the largely masculine world of 'meetings' to which his mother attributed her husband's absence and virtue, La Guma too was away from home, but increasingly in his father's presence. Jimmy's position as editor of and contributor to the NLL's publication *The Liberator: A Non-European Anti-Imperialist Magazine* provides us with indicators of how his writing and politics contributed to his son's literary and political development and interest in drawing and painting. It may also have provided sources for his fiction.

Sometime during the second half of 1936, two men arrived in the NLL offices. Two men known as Michaels and Eliap Galant, who by February the following year chaired the NLL's Ebenezer branch, had walked from Ebenezer in the district of Klawer in the north-western Cape to Cape Town, a distance of approximately 320 kms.⁴⁷ They hoped that the NLL would help their community to retain the mission-station land it had occupied for a century, and which the government intended to expropriate, offering other land with inferior soil as a replacement. The community had resisted forced removals, there had been a 'riot' with arrests and one death, and it had then taken the matter to court. A NLL commission went to Klawer in November 1936, and in February the following year Jimmy was part of a second NLL commission that visited this inhospitable area.⁴⁸ These events reappeared in modified form some forty years later in *Time of the Butcherbird*, La Guma's last completed novel. He was not the only one affected by such incidents from that region. Alf Wannenburg's short story 'Awendgesang' also deals with the forced removal of a rural coloured community and its search for a meaningful response to this tragedy in either acceptance through religious fatalism or resistance through politics.⁴⁹

In the following year La Guma, now 12, helped out in the NLL offices along with the sons of other members of the editorial board. While La Guma is credited with artwork in the first issue of *The Liberator* (see end of chapter), just how much he contributed to subsequent issues is uncertain. All five issues of the magazine contain a variety of amateur or childlike graphic headlines, sketches and portraits variously signed 'Leaguer' and 'Bystander'.⁵⁰

Jimmy's position as Cissie Gool's election agent in the municipal by-elections of June 1938 and the anti-segregation campaigns of 1938 and 1939, in which the NLL played a leading role through the NEUF, required people such as 'Rustum Gool, Brown Jnr, and La Guma Jnr', all sons of leading NLL members, to 'paint posters, decorate the banners or illustrate the leaflets' [Fig. 2.1]. According to Barto, La Guma's younger son, La Guma felt this was a practice worth repeating, for Barto worked in the ANC's London office on Saturday mornings.⁵¹

Jimmy contributed to *The Liberator* in a number of ways. The magazine's first issue contains the lyrics and score of 'Dark folks arise, the long night is over' [Fig. 2.2]. The journal's contents page attributes it to 'E Carpenter (Eng.)', but La Guma later described it as his father's adaptation of 'an old English working-class song' that became the NLL's 'national anthem'.⁵²

Dark folks Arise! The long night is over.
 Faint in the east, behold the day appear.
 Out of your evil dream of toil and sorrow,
 Arise ye dark folks, for the day is here.
 From each wretched slum, let the loud cry come.
 Arise! ye dark folks, for the day is here.

By your young children's eyes so red with weeping.
 By their wan faces, filled with want and fear.
 By the dark alleys, where your babes are creeping.
 From each wretched slum, let the loud cry come.
 Arise. ye dark folks for the day is here.

Forth then, ye heroes, patriots and lovers.
 Brothers of danger, poverty and scorn.
 Mighty in Faith of Freedom your great mother.
 Giants refreshed in Joy's new rising morn.

Come and swell the song, silent now so long.
 Dark folks are risen! and the Day is here!⁵³

Other poems from this period, such as 'Golden Morn' and 'Hark ye! friends and fellow workers', carry Jimmy's name:

I saw a cloud in the dawning,
 Rise out of a reddening sky.
 It beckoned me onward, forward.
 I wondered, should I?
 It bespoke the birth of Freedom,
 Born of Labour, accouched by Wrong
 And I could not but mingle
 With the ever increasing throng.

That marched in serried ranks of iron
 In its wake and ruddy hue.
 Determined with a will to wrest,
 Monopoly from the few.
 Thrones tumbled, hate incensed,
 The robbers fled before the dawn
 Of revolt. Yea! red revolt,
 Heraldng a golden morn.⁵⁴

Given their identical rhyme schemes and shared imagery of an exploited and unified working class at the point of or in revolt, Jimmy might also have written the following poem:

Hark ye! Friends and fellow workers,

The cry throughout the land.
 Africa lifts her weary head
 And stretches forth her hand.
 The horny hand of the worker,
 Blistered and scarred by toil,
 That others may reap their fill of wealth
 Wrested by her from toil.⁵⁵

Jimmy may have been influenced by poetry that appeared in the Garveyite *Negro World* in the United States between the mid 1920s and the mid 1930s. This poetry articulated what Robin Kelley has described as 'Black nationalist ideologies' and demonstrated that 'ethnic nationalism and internationalism were not mutually exclusive'.⁵⁶ If this was the case, then Jimmy's poetry clearly sought to integrate national liberation and class struggle inspired by socialism. This was evident in personification of Africa, and his references to 'red revolt'. Later, and with a more specific focus on the role of coloureds within debates on the national question, La Guma would seek to advance this view.

In *The Liberator's* first editorial, 'Down to the Masses!', Jimmy wrote that the journal was launched to highlight 'the evils of Imperialism...and the need for the oppressed peoples creating a mass power with the aim of freeing the country from this incubus' of imperialism. Another of his contributions, 'We Demand Social Equality!', questioned whether 'racial purity' existed and attacked whites who used 'the old bogey of miscegenation' and the "'do you want your sister to marry a kaffir cry'" against coloureds as a way of preventing them from forming political alliances with Africans. He also attacked those coloureds who avoided politics because it might spoil the chances of "'my sister marrying a white man'", and criticised unspecified coloured political leaders, probably those associated with the APO and the Coloured-European Councils, who viewed 'social, political and economic equality' as separate issues. His message was: 'If you are a non-European. LOSE THAT INFERIORITY COMPLEX!'. There were other contributions. His friend

Ziervogel contributed an article on 'The Cape before the White Man'. It argued against the misconception that the Cape was uninhabited when Jan van Riebeeck arrived. Readers were told that this would be the first of a series entitled 'Rambles in South African Historical Byways'.⁵⁷

Culturally and politically, there are indications of African-American influences on *The Liberator*, and some of them had a lasting effect on Alex la Guma. Its main foreign news source was the *Negro Worker*, a publication of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, which was an initiative of the Communist International.⁵⁸ African-American communists had influenced the Comintern's policy towards South Africa. These communists had emerged from the Garveyite tradition that had influenced ICU, ANC and CPSA members such as Gomas and Jimmy la Guma nationally and in the Western Cape a decade earlier. This was the period when Jimmy had returned from Moscow supporting the Comintern's position on the Native Republic debate.⁵⁹ Ten years later *The Liberator* maintained this tradition in a modified form.

Not unlike its American predecessor the *Harlem Liberator*, *The Liberator's* cultural component carried a strong anti-fascist message and reflected a concern with racial and class issues primarily from a masculine perspective. There was a serialised version of *From Superman to Man* by J.A. Rogers, an African-American journalist living in Paris during the 1920s and 1930s. According to Fabre, Rogers was the 'author of half a dozen volumes recording black cultural contributions or tracing famous people's genealogies to their authentic or imagined Negro ancestry'.⁶⁰ A clear attack on Nietzsche whose ideas at that time were popularly associated with fascism, the story is about Dixon, a gifted African-American man who had been continually frustrated in life due to racial discrimination. He now works as a sleeping-car porter on an American train. In the course of the serial Dixon disproves fascist theories of racial superiority and wins an argument with a racist Southern senator.⁶¹ The journal also carried a poem by Georgia Douglas Johnson, one of the most prolific woman poets of the Harlem Renaissance.⁶² In 'A

Song of Courage' [Fig. 2.3], the speaker is a mother whose 'black face and rugged hair' encounters 'bald derision' from 'this jeering world':

Brave as a lion I must be
 To face this jeering world
 With my black face and rugged hair,
 When every lip is curled
 In bald derision as I pass,
 A shadow on the looking-glass.

Braver than lions must I be
 To give this child of mine
 This heritage of certain scorn
 A place amid the swine,
 And bind him over to the sod
 A tethered creature sorrow-shod.

Braver than all the brave must be
 The race of men I bear,
 Forged in the furnaces of hell
 And wrought to Iron there.
 The future years have need of them –
 I sense it, though my sight is dim!

Accompanied by the childlike picture of a figure breaking the bars of a prison cell, the poem expresses the conviction that children who suffered racial prejudice and economic exploitation would contribute to a distant, future freedom. There was also poetry by Langston Hughes that attacked the ruling class:

To you

Who are the
 Foam on the sea
 And not the sea –
 What of the jagged rocks,
 And the waves themselves
 And the force of the mounting waters?
 You rich, You are
 But foam on the sea
 NOT THE SEA.⁶³

Through *The Liberator* La Guma was exposed to an inclusive notion of African identity that incorporated all racially oppressed South Africans, but whose literary inspirations were drawn in part from the Harlem Renaissance with its simultaneously enabling and restrictive characteristics. It was egalitarian yet, as Maureen Honey has noted, ‘women as mothers were glorified’ in the form of the “‘Brown Madonna’”. The journal drew on ‘one of the primary metaphors of the New Negro movement... that of the young mother leading the race to a brighter day’. Simultaneously, it was aided and limited by a heavy reliance on classical western poetic genres. The result was a sometimes ‘awkward fusion of radical sentiment and sentimental form’.⁶⁴

Paul Robeson’s activities and movements featured regularly in Cape Town publications with a predominantly coloured readership. In a speech carried by *The Liberator* in its final issue, Robeson attacked ‘false ideas of racial and national superiority’ and called on artists and scientists to become involved in the fight against fascism in Spain.⁶⁵ Robeson was the subject of several articles in *The Sun* on cultural and political issues. Topics included his pride in his Black identity, his controversial participation in the film *Sanders of the River* in which he played the part of Bosambo, his concerts in various parts of the USSR and Barcelona.⁶⁶ Coupled with the generally positive coverage which Robeson, Hughes and Eugene Gordon received in *The Sun* and the *Cape Standard*, these details appear to have

made a considerable political impact on the young La Guma. In 1938 he tried to fight in the Spanish Civil War by volunteering for the International Brigade, though not surprisingly at the age of 13 he was unsuccessful.⁶⁷ Thirty-three years later, in 1971, he returned to this article in *The Liberator* for his own address to a symposium on Robeson in the former German Democratic Republic. Here La Guma quoted at length from his speech to argue that artists could not remove themselves from the struggle against fascism.⁶⁸ It is within a context provided partly by the Harlem Renaissance and partly by the politics of a popular front which his father felt should be dominated by the Communist Party that we should see the development of La Guma's early reading habits and the emergence of graphic skills. In the next section we shall see that Jimmy's views on the relationship between literary and political identity helped shape his son's view of his social responsibilities as a coloured writer.

More should take advantage of it

During his first City Council election campaign in 1939 and through the NDL, Jimmy had articulated a strong sense that a specifically coloured identity was both lacking and necessary, and that it should be intimately linked to what we might now describe as 'economic empowerment'. Jimmy also expressed this in literary terms. 'Too little of the Coloured man's literary efforts have been preserved and I would like to see more young writers producing work and helping to create a literary tradition among the Coloureds', wrote Jimmy la Guma in a letter to the *Cape Standard* in November 1939 when Alex was 14 years old:

The non-European press provides budding authors and poets an excellent opportunity to see their early efforts in print, and I feel that more should take advantage of it. This, I think, will be the first step towards the building up of a group of Coloured writers.⁶⁹

Jimmy's letter is significant for our understanding of the relationship between this father and his son, for it was one of the few occasions on which he appears to have publicly expressed an opinion on an issue so significant for his son's future. However, his was not the first word on the issue. Local papers directed at a coloured readership had already voiced his concerns. For some time *The Sun* had carried poems by Sulyman Ismail whose anthology, *Ashes of Meditation: A Book of Verse*, had appeared in 1936. Even earlier, in 1933, in an echo of the Harlem Renaissance's equation between literary output and social elevation, one correspondent had argued that coloured writers should already have been producing sustained fictional work in the form of novels, because 'a younger generation...will want to see a further advanced Coloured community'.⁷⁰ The writer of that article clearly accepts as given that shorter literary works by coloured writers were already in circulation and, significantly, that writing novels was a sign and condition of the continued evolution of a community as a whole. This view appears to have been widespread. When La Guma was contributing to *The Liberator* in 1936 and 1937, *The Sun*, another Cape Town weekly with a predominantly coloured readership, commemorated the centenary of Pushkin and Dumas, two internationally famous writers whom it described as coloured, and there were articles on other famous coloured figures such as the Italian prince Alessandro de Medici and an early Dutch governor of the Cape, Simon van der Stel.⁷¹ For *Sun* readers, Dumas and Pushkin had value and significance as successful coloureds in the South African sense through whom it might be possible to generate a local coloured literary identity based on international coloured role models.

La Guma later presented himself as a coloured writer who wrote about his own national group, but the literary foundations for this role were not regional. His recollections of his personal reading history stress 'universality' and 'quality'. He read a lot 'since early childhood...the usual things that little children read', such as works by Robert Louis Stevenson, Victor Hugo, Dumas and Walter Scott. These were later replaced by 'adventure stories, westerns, detective stories'.⁷² His interest appears to have coincided with indications that reading and informal self-education

were becoming more popular social habits in District Six. In 1934 Christian Ziervogel, popularly known as 'die Professor van Distrik Ses', started up the Liberman library by donating his personal collection of 3 000 books.⁷³ Given the fact that Jimmy's and Ziervogel's life stories confirmed the link between the acquisition of books, reading and self-improvement, it is very likely that Jimmy la Guma would have encouraged any interest in reading since he too was 'an avid reader of anything he could lay his hands on'.⁷⁴ In 1935 the library of the Liberman Institute reported a rapid growth in borrowers. In April its reading-room and subscription library had 500 adult and 400 child subscribers, and by May the total number of subscribers had risen to 1 300.⁷⁵

For some the advent of Peter Abrahams seemed to remedy this perceived lack of progress towards a coloured literary identity. The nineteen-year-old Abrahams had arrived in Cape Town in 1938 preceded by a favourable review of his poetry and an open letter to *The Sun* in which he described himself as 'a Coloured youth... keen to aid in the liberation of the oppressed peoples of South Africa through...writing'. He would be visiting Cape Town, he said, to 'make contact with intellectual groups of literary men', and to find 'a better market' for his work.⁷⁶ As we have seen, Abrahams participated in the organisation of anti-segregation campaigns and spoke at the NEUF mass meeting on 27 March 1939 on the Grand Parade that Jimmy chaired. For a while he slept in the NLL offices, though not necessarily for political reasons. In *Tell Freedom* he notes that he 'rarely spent a night there alone. There were others who had nowhere else to go'. He also stayed with Goolam Gool and the La Guma family before he left Cape Town.⁷⁷

In January 1939, Peter Abrahams delivered a lecture on 'American Negro Poets' to the New Era Fellowship.⁷⁸ Despite the exposure which some of these poets had received through *The Liberator*, the sense of personal revelation, literary purpose and political identity that accompanied his own and (later) Rive's exposure to these writers and artists does not appear to have had an immediate impact on District Six or its opinion makers.⁷⁹ In Rive's case, his view of himself as a 'dark' coloured with a putative African-American ancestry contributed to his strong

no
interest in
African-
American writers
(in this)

identification with these writers – but only after he had recognised himself in Abrahams' earlier work.⁸⁰ It would be almost six months before 'Uncle Jim' in the children's section of the *Cape Standard* tried to stimulate the emergence of coloured writers through a story competition. He pointed out to his young readers that 'in South Africa there is a plot and character in almost every street'. By way of encouragement, in a statement that revealed an equally acute sense of the relation between coloured colour consciousness and literary productivity, he added that Dumas 'was a lot darker than many of us and that fact did not and could not handicap him'.⁸¹ As Peter Abrahams' stories written between 1930 and 1938 and collected in *Dark Testament* indicate, there was deep-rooted prejudice amongst coloureds towards Africans.⁸² Another six months would pass before Jimmy's letter appeared and another two years would pass before the *Cape Standard* informed its readers that the Liberman library had books dealing with 'the progress of the Negro in America...books on Negro culture, history and poetry'.⁸³

Despite the fact that by 1938 readers of *The Liberator* or the *Cape Standard* would have known about Hughes and Robeson, a number of factors may have contributed to this delayed interest. The Bantu Men's Social Centre in Johannesburg with its library and recordings of Robeson may have provided the specific context in which Abrahams' desire to become a writer emerged, but this would not necessarily have applied to the Cape. Given the attention that famous writers (re)constituted as coloured such as Pushkin and Dumas had already received, African-American writers may not initially have been seen as significant literary models. There were also political factors. According to a contemporary critic in the CPSA's *The Guardian*, Abrahams' debt to Richard Wright and Langston Hughes weakened his 'excellently written and bitterly true' stories.⁸⁴ The latter newspaper and its successors never changed their position on Abrahams' work when, after settling in Britain, he broke with the Communist Party of Great Britain. By contrast, Dumas and Pushkin were the authors of realist and ostensibly 'timeless' historical 'classics' when compared to the relatively modern and modernist works of the Harlem Renaissance. They might therefore have had greater appeal to those, Marxists

among them, who equated good literature with nineteenth-century bourgeois realism.⁸⁵ In addition, *The Liberator* was primarily a political journal with literary contributions subservient to and directed towards its political aims. Its contributors and readers would not necessarily have seen a contribution to the development of coloured *writing* in poems by Hughes and Johnston or a serialised story by Rogers.⁸⁶

Public discussion about coloured writers in the period between Abrahams' lecture to the New Era Fellowship and the *Cape Standard's* article on the Liberman library's African-American holdings also supports this possibility. In December 1939, the Mayor of Cape Town wrote in *The Standard* about the need for coloured writers and stressed that 'knowledge of literature' was more important for the prospective writer than higher education.⁸⁷ Two weeks later, an article in the same paper drew on Sarah Gertrude Millin's *God's Stepchildren* to justify the view that 'the one great fault of the Coloured people is the lack of initiative', and to argue that journalism did not always provide the best training for fiction writing. Instead coloured writers could attain recognition by doing for the people of District Six what Edgar Wallace, a commercially successful writer of London working class origin and best known today for his *Sanders of the River* series of imperialist novels for boys, had done for the people of 'Whitechapel, Limehouse and other slums in England'. Coloured writers could demonstrate 'that the inhabitants of slums have an inherent sense of humour and other redeeming qualities which show that they are not as black [*sic*] as they are painted'.⁸⁸

The articles suggested that it was possible and necessary for coloureds to produce self-representations for themselves and for others. The writers of these articles set out to persuade prospective coloured writers to adopt a value system influenced by imperialist thinking on views of race, miscegenation and the urban working class that was found in popular literary genres. Elements in the convergence included the idea that races had particular qualities, that miscegenation produced negative qualities and that the resulting racial hybrids and the urban working class both had to be managed. Their advocacy of Millin and Wallace had some basis in reality, but did not always produce the results they desired. In Peter Abrahams'

Dark Testament we find one of his characters reading a Wallace novel.⁸⁹ According to *The Standard*, it was still possible for coloureds to give themselves a literary and political presence, but at the cost of some self-negation. Millin's and Wallace's hostility towards perceived racial hybridity, and Wallace's view that the tribes of the river and the working class had to be forcefully and at times cynically managed, undermined the value of any recognition which the ruling class or caste as the guardian of good taste, racial purity and cultural maturity could bestow.

There was also a comparative and competitive aspect. Other perceived national or racial groups had a clearer identity and had already produced literature such as Sol Plaatje's *Mhudi* in 1930 and H.I.E. Dhlomo's play *The Girl Who Killed to Save*, which the *Cape Standard* had reviewed in 1936.⁹⁰ Through Christian Ziervogel the Liberman Institute also contributed to the debate. In late 1941 Ziervogel, who acted on Peter Abrahams' behalf in soliciting items for an anthology of black South African writing which Abrahams intended to produce after World War II, organised an exhibition entitled 'The Non-European in Print'.⁹¹ The exhibition featured work by Dumas, Pushkin, Palme Dutt, Paul Robeson, Marion Anderson and his own recently published *Know This – Brown South Africa*.⁹² While the term 'Non-European' covered everyone who was not 'white', Ziervogel's organisation of the material available to him reflected a sense of coloured identity that acknowledged general racial oppression, but saw coloureds as separate from African South Africans and African-Americans. It also accepted and perpetuated a hierarchy of literary production on racial lines which placed white literature at the top. Ziervogel divided the material into three sections: the literature and journalism of African-Americans, which was 'in every way comparable to the European [literature]'; 'literature being produced by and for the Bantu in South Africa'; and 'that contributed by the Coloured people of the Cape'. One reviewer regarded the latter as 'perhaps the weakest part of the exhibition'.⁹³

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the *Cape Standard* still felt that 'the Coloured people haven't produced a single great writer', that it should suggest a coloured magazine to publish fiction by coloured writers was necessary,

and that coloured writers of this period were ‘pioneers’ and ‘literary aspirants’.⁹⁴ It was still possible to become that ‘great’ writer. Some 40 years later, La Guma’s comment that he had made a ‘conscious effort’ to write about the ‘community and life’ of District Six and Cape Town because ‘nothing satisfactory or worthwhile...had been written about the area’, suggests that La Guma had self-consciously adopted for himself the role of the authentic literary voice of coloured ‘community and life’. By criticising his contemporaries he established for himself and for others a specific cultural and racial identity through his fiction.⁹⁵

At the same time there was considerable dissatisfaction with the term ‘Coloured’. In 1940, the *Cape Standard* noted that ‘[u]sage without any challenge brought the term “coloured” into being, a term which is viewed in South Africa as meaning an “inferior person”’. The paper questioned whether there was a ‘legal definition’ for the term which government could apply.⁹⁶ Clearly there was ambivalence about the status of coloured identity. From a literary perspective it was a way of identifying and distinguishing oneself, while from a political perspective it was associated with racial inferiority, economic exploitation and real political exclusion. In effect, the issue was about who controlled use of the term. Here two significant discourses about race and literature intersected, at times overlapping at times contesting the same ideas. Firstly there were British imperialist views on miscegenation, hybridity and control of the working class in the metropolitan centre and the colonial periphery. Secondly, there was the literary ‘pan colouredism’ articulated by Ziervogel. These two discourses strongly influenced La Guma’s thinking about cultural and political issues. They also created the conditions for a diversity of textual and graphic literary, journalistic and political forms directed at pleasure, protest and social upliftment. Subsequent chapters will deal with these issues.

Emotions bitter they so willingly suppress

La Guma started at Trafalgar High School, Cape Town’s first coloured secondary school, in 1938.⁹⁷ His parents believed that education was important and that he

should “lead a useful life”. He associated this directive with the picture of Lenin and discussions among visiting adults on political and trade-union matters. Entry into Trafalgar High carried status and social obligation, for the academic success of its pupils was linked to their contribution to the community.⁹⁸ In 1996 several of his surviving classmates recalled La Guma as a tall, thin, quiet boy with relatively few friends at school, who did not participate in any sports. He was in the ‘academic’ as opposed to the ‘general’ stream. The former was regarded as preparation for teacher training college or university, and pupils studied English, Afrikaans, Latin, Mathematics, Biology, Geography and Science, or Hygiene and Physiology.⁹⁹ Other contemporaries recall that he read a lot, was particularly interested in English, and that he liked to debate issues with his teachers. Those who were politically aware at that age recognised him as the son of a prominent figure, but do not remember him as someone who dwelt much on political issues at the time.¹⁰⁰

La Guma’s own recollections of the period are different. We have already encountered his attempt to volunteer for the International Brigade, and in 1940, the year in which he wrote the Junior Certificate exam, he volunteered for the Union Defence Force. Here too he was unsuccessful.¹⁰¹ La Guma’s political knowledge by encounters with different forms of Marxism. Though he may well have encountered allusions to them through Jimmy, his secondary school years seem to have been the first time that he was systematically exposed to ideas about the “‘permanent revolution” as well as dire criticism and outright attacks on the Soviet Union’. This exposure coincided with the formation of the New Era Fellowship in 1939 and the appointment of Mr B.M. Kies to the school staff.¹⁰² Given the apparent vagaries of Soviet international relations during the late 1930s and early 1940s, calls for a permanent revolution might have seemed intellectually and politically more consistent and appealing to many. Against this, La Guma posed the emotional bonds of family values. He found these attacks on the Soviet Union ‘offensive...for in our family’, he later wrote, ‘we had always been taught to cherish and admire the Socialist Sixth of the World’. This was a clear reference to Hewlett Johnson’s book

of the same name which was published in 1939, and which received much publicity in *The Guardian* during the late thirties and early forties.¹⁰³

He did not stay at Trafalgar High very long. Exactly when or why he left school is unclear. We know that it was after he wrote the Junior Certificate exam in 1940 and sometime in 1941 or 1942, because in 1941 he used to visit the home of George Herman, one of his class mates, whose younger sister Blanche he later married. La Guma has described his high-school years as a 'period of restlessness' and has linked this stage in his life to the Spanish Civil War and the start of Second World War.¹⁰⁴ This association suggests that here Jimmy strongly influenced his son's political outlook. On this occasion Jimmy's views went against the Party's which followed the CPSU's neutrality policy. Jimmy regarded Second World War as 'a continuation of the Spanish Civil War...Hitler and Mussolini were...attacking the working-class of Europe and its movement...and internationalism demanded that the workers be defended.' Later La Guma wrote that Jimmy 'believed in a united front with the bourgeois democracies against the fascist reaction.'¹⁰⁵ Jimmy had volunteered at a time when *The Sun*, the *Cape Standard*, the CLDS, the NLL and the CPSA all regarded the separate registration of white, African and coloured volunteers, the revival of the Cape Coloured Corps and the formation of an Indian and Malay Corps as a request for coloureds to fight for the freedom of others while they themselves suffered racial discrimination at home.¹⁰⁶ This did not prevent the NLL from supporting democratic whites such as Lance Morley-Turner (the 'Red Sergeant') from enlisting with its approval.¹⁰⁷ Seemingly oblivious to the fact that a similar motivation by the APO during the First World War had failed to produce any gains for coloureds, in his public pronouncements at least Jimmy la Guma appears to have taken a longer, conciliatory and more optimistic view of the matter. He argued that 'after victory when we ask for a better deal, it cannot be said of us that we did not help our country in her hour of need'.¹⁰⁸ The poem, 'These Brown African Sons', appeared in *The Sun* during June 1940 with the initials L.G. J. (a likely re-ordering of Jimmy's initials) and deals with this topic. Addressing the fact that racially

oppressed South Africans volunteered in the name of a greater good, its first and last verses read:

Fettered and oppressed, they wearily drag their load,
 Praying for bread – they pitifully champ on stone.
 Comes the clarion call, and like man Unit'd
 Struggle they cease and struggle commence –
 Brown Sons of Africa.

...

They're hated and spurned 'neath oppressor's heel
 – But 'tis *Espirit de Corps* they still preserve.
 Emotions bitter they so willingly suppress
 For Brotherhood common to Man to express –
 Great Sons of Africa.¹⁰⁹

Demobilised in 1947, perhaps Jimmy la Guma was one of those of whom his son wrote that they 'shook their heads and wondered what they had fought for'.¹¹⁰

Given his political profile and organisational experience, Jimmy was something of a catch for the war effort. Too old for the Cape Corps, he lied about his age, joined the Indian and Malay Corps and was soon promoted to staff sergeant.¹¹¹ Cynical observers have suggested that having lost his second City Council election contest and at a low point in his political career, the army offered him and his family a steady income and an escape from Cape Town.¹¹² According to La Guma's sister Joan, this was one of the few times that the family had a regular income. Soldiers' wives and dependants received a daily allowance that was partly linked to the rank of the serving family member, though allowances were racially graded.¹¹³

South Africa's relative isolation during the war encouraged the growth of a manufacturing sector, and military recruitment created male labour shortages. Under these circumstances it would not have been difficult for La Guma to find work after he left school. His first job was in a warehouse, making parcels and moving

furniture. With some amusement at his adolescent romanticism about the proletariat, he later recalled that he needed to be closer to the workers. He got a job in the Metal Box factory in Cape Town in a plant that 'manufactured metal "dixies" for the army'.¹¹⁴

La Guma worked at Metal Box for 12 to 18 months. Despite the ironic amusement with which he later looked back on it, this was a significant period. At a time when the Soviet Union had entered the war and political consciousness had increased, he became more aware of labour alienation and exploitation. His first articulations of communism grew out of this experience. On his own admission he 'seemed to have become a great talker...about a lot of things....International news, South African politics, the colour-bar'. Consequently, '[s]ome of the workers viewed [him] with curiosity. They asked [him] whether [he] was a communist'. He concluded that he 'must have been explaining things, explaining situations, in the manner of a communist'.¹¹⁵ The novelty factor which La Guma and his audience acknowledge is significant here, for he repeats *as if it had no precedent* the representation of himself as someone who can hold the attention of others through narratives, though these have now acquired explanatory form. Secondly, La Guma acquires the identity of a communist through other's perception of himself, for a storyteller can only be recognised as such by an audience. This is later confirmed by his participation in 'talk of a strike' and his election onto a strike committee which contributed to his losing his job.¹¹⁶

Warehouse and assembly line work were 'blind-alley' or 'dead-end' jobs into which lack of formal education or training, racial prejudice and job reservation forced the majority of coloured youth. All of these factors would later feature in one of his early pieces for *New Age*, 'The Dead-End Kids of Hanover Street'.¹¹⁷ With political growth came literary maturity, for the move from school to the 'real world' accompanied a shift from 'the usual things that little children read, such as *The Courtship of Maurice Buckler*, to 'the more serious classics'. These included 'Shakespeare, the Russian authors, Tolstoy, Gorky, the American authors, James T. Farrell, Steinbeck and Hemingway'.¹¹⁸ His interest in reading appears to have

coincided with a more widespread interest in literature that dealt with social issues occasioned by the war and the blackout. In 1943, the Liberman library reported that Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* was one of its most popular books, and that the number of borrowers had increased to such an extent that they could only take out one book at a time.¹¹⁹ By the early 1960s, when La Guma had finished *And a Threefold Cord*, there were clear signs of Steinbeck's influence on the ideas, content and writing of his work. This will be the subject of a later chapter.

Assessing the factors that contributed to his political consciousness, he acknowledges the importance of his family circle. 'My parents', he later wrote, 'were of the working-class, but they were also class and politically conscious people'. Here La Guma makes a distinction that would enable him to speak and write about the working class in two separate ways. There would be descriptions 'of the working class' and, quite distinct from the former but simultaneously incorporating it, representations of the working class as 'class and politically conscious people'.¹²⁰ This would give him the freedom to shift between 'anthropological' descriptions of the working class as an entity with specific but ostensibly non-political characteristics into which he could read degrees of political consciousness, and the working class as a force aware of its historical and political role through actions such as strikes, trade union activity involving his mother and father, or politically significant gestures by family friends who renamed their house 'Stalingrad' during the Second World War.¹²¹

La Guma's writings on others relied on these separate representations of the working class, but autobiographical pieces relied heavily upon their integration coupled with a strong sense of decay. His early childhood memories mentioned in the previous chapter associated District Six in winter with rain, a 'smelly lane' and a 'stench [that] hung over the district, rising from blocked drains and rotting piles of rubbish'. In later years this sense of disgust extended to the whole of District Six, which he described as

... that area of Cape Town into which crammed thousands of families of the Coloured working class. Its slums stretched from the slopes of Table Mountain to the sea where the sewers belched their vomit into the Atlantic and where we as children splashed in the foul water during the hot summer holidays. It was the cheapest outing for the poor, picknicking [*sic*] on Woodstock Beach, a stone's throw from the municipal dumping ground and the outlets for the sewerage system. Everybody came down out of the hot, grey streets, the blistering tenements, the foul alleyways.¹²²

By 1939 it was clear that extensions to Cape Town harbour would deprive these children of even this beach, described by the *Cape Standard* as the 'most popular playground' of the District's children.¹²³

We do not make class struggle. We merely explain it.

La Guma was not alone in his view of District Six as a place of disease and like an open sewer. During the Second World War, soldiers on Allied troopships were warned about the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases among Cape Town's coloured prostitutes and forbidden to enter District Six, or to even speak to coloureds.¹²⁴ In 1949, the *Cape Times* described the homes of District Six as 'dingy caverns' with inadequate sanitation that produced 'an indescribable odour'.¹²⁵ La Guma recalled that

[o]n the street corners the children shot dice and the dagga cigarettes passed from mouth to mouth. In the lamplight the razor-edged knives flashed and the blood mingled with the spittle and the rivulets of stagnant black water.¹²⁶

After school 'on the hillside above the city', where the foundations of a decent citizenry were laid, he would 'come down again into the smelly environs of District

Six'.¹²⁷ From this period and later, in terms that echo the words of the *Cape Times*, he remembers

...Daniel a jolly black boy with a smile full of white teeth.... Somewhere along the line we drifted apart. When I met him again years later he had turned into a gangster and was continually in and out of prison. There was Habiba, a beautiful member of the Moslem community...with her great eyes and long, straight black hair framing her olive-skinned face. Again, many years later, when I was canvassing for an election, I knocked on the door of a municipal voter...there was something that had been a woman looking out at me. Matted greying hair was untidily wrapped in a kerchief, the face had fallen into loose wrinkles, prematurely aged, the rotten teeth smiled curiously at me above the body that had collapsed under greasy clothes. She smiled at me from a background like a dark cavern full of smells.... Now there was just a hag whose eyes I recognised and who recognised me.¹²⁸

The district was a 'teeming morass', a place of entanglement. Political consciousness and education were one of the few means to escape and rise above this environment.¹²⁹ Topographically and symbolically, school was above the morass, yet it also obstructed his progress, for he 'wanted to get through school in order to enter a more dynamic world'. He realised that the capacity to rise above the 'morass' depended on reading and on acknowledging that he could only escape from it by recognising in himself the anthropologically perceived working-class 'other' that could not escape.

I read *The Iron Heel* and saw in Jack London's *The People of the Abyss* my own community ground down under the weight of poverty, oppression and ignorance. Could it be that 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 in school.¹³⁰

La Guma used the dialectic between determinism and self-conscious activism present in the works of London and Tressell to explain the emergence of his own political awareness. Political events such as the Spanish Civil War made him restless at school, so that he rejected what he regarded as irrelevant education. At the same time he gained greater knowledge of the general conditions of oppression and political resistance through literature.

The view that European and American naturalism were strong influences on La Guma has led several critics to see in La Guma's texts pessimism about the ability of isolated individuals to transcend their environments.¹³¹ Aspects of work by London, Wallace and Tressell may help us to understand how La Guma's work managed to convey both this pessimism and a strong belief that collective action could challenge social and economic inequality and injustice. Their work may also help us to see what relations he established between literature, politics and history, and consequently how he saw himself in the 1970s and 1980s in relation to the District Six of the 1930s, 1940s and early 1950s. Jack London's enduring popularity in the Soviet Union probably encouraged La Guma's interest in his work.¹³² On one of his visits to Moscow in the mid-1970s, La Guma noted that 'Russian translations of Jack London, Hemingway, Dickens, Shakespeare, Mark Twain ranked shoulder to shoulder with Tolstoy, Gorky, Pushkin, Gogol'. This established a canon of writers that spanned his reading interests from adolescence to adulthood and linked him to his father.¹³³ London shared several features with that earlier problematical model, Edgar Wallace.¹³⁴ Wallace's and London's reputations depended in part on their images as self-educated, commercially successful writers who freely used personal and journalistic experiences in works such as London's *The People of the Abyss* and *The Iron Heel*. Both writers articulated popular notions of Darwinism, though London tried to combine his Darwinism with socialism and the individualism of strong heroes noticeably absent from La Guma's work.¹³⁵ Robert Tressell's *The*

Ragged Trousered Philanthropists was widely regarded as an example of how politically committed literature could have a political impact.¹³⁶ According to Ray Alexander, the work made a strong impression on Jimmy and circulated widely in Cape Town's progressive community.¹³⁷ Its author spent some time in South Africa and was associated with the Irish Brigade, which fought with the 'anti-imperialist' Boers against the British empire during the Anglo-Boer War.¹³⁸ The novel's significance to Jimmy and his son may also have depended on a case of life imitating art that in turn imitated life. In 1938, when Jimmy la Guma was Cissie Gool's election agent, the South African Party opposition candidate allegedly tried to bribe him with the offer of a 'painting and decorating' job – exactly the sort of work performed by the main characters in Tressell's novel.¹³⁹

Jack London's work on the East End of London emphasises environmental determinism and how poor living conditions, overcrowding and exploitative labour practices caused the decay and degeneration of the working class. London's text remains an effective but pessimistic exposé, for it offered no real alternative other than the reorganisation of society and 'a capable management put at the head'.¹⁴⁰ Perhaps La Guma turned to *The Iron Heel*, a novel that shared with Gorky's *Mother* an origin in the failures of the 1905 Russian Revolution, for the inevitability of progress and the eventual success of socialism. Ernest Everhard, the hero of *The Iron Heel* who earned a living by translating scientific texts, understood the present and planned for the future on the basis of 'the world movement of labour', scientific socialism and class struggle. "We do not make class struggle. We merely explain it, as Newton explained gravitation" he told one of his audiences in the novel, for "the tide of evolution never flows backward...it flows from combination to combination, and from little combination to large combination...to colossal combination, and it flows on to socialism, which is the most colossal combination of all."¹⁴¹

If Everhard sought to remain among the people yet transcend their limited political outlook through knowledge of historical and dialectical materialism, La Guma too aimed to rise above District Six by reading London and Tressell and by recognising the universal nature of exploitation and proletarian existence. Later we

shall see that these two desires resulted in anomalies, tensions and contradictions in his fiction. Like London the journalist, La Guma saw evidence of degeneration in the slum and the jail – environments associated with the working class. In addition, if La Guma read *The Iron Heel* during the 1940s, as he himself suggests, he might have interpreted it as a prophecy of European fascism – “a shadow of something colossal and menacing that even now is beginning to fall across the land”. During the 1920s and 1930s this was one of its popular left-wing political readings.¹⁴² This could also have resonated with readers who later viewed apartheid as a form of fascism opposed by the combined efforts of mass uprisings and a disciplined underground political and military organisation of the sort found in London’s novel.¹⁴³

For a journalist and novelist, La Guma drew attention to similarities of content, but was noticeably silent on the formal properties of the works that affected him. In *The People of the Abyss*, Jack London is anything but an objective reporter on the early twentieth century’s East End. Stallybrass and White’s observation about Engels and Dickens, that ‘the representations of filth which traverse their work are unstable, sliding between social, moral and psychic domains’, fits London well. The latter wrote that ‘the miserable multitudes... seemed so many waves of a vast and malodorous sea, lapping about me and threatening to well up and over me’.¹⁴⁴ While La Guma’s autobiographical pieces show a stronger desire to separate the people described from their environmental determinants, he shares with London a horror and disgust at the degradation and degeneration that slum conditions cause. For London, ‘[c]lass supremacy can only rest on class degradation; and when the workers are segregated in the Ghetto,’ as they were in District Six, ‘they cannot escape the consequent degradation’ of body and mind.¹⁴⁵ La Guma was equally silent on the narrative strategy of *The Iron Heel*, a novel with two simultaneous narrators and written in two separate modes – the romantic and the historical. The text is presented as the annotated version of a discovered and incomplete manuscript. Originally written by Everhard’s lover during a time of intense struggle between the Oligarchy and socialists, the editor writes from a much later period in which socialism has triumphed, contextualising the events described by the ‘original’

narrator through a preface and footnotes. La Guma's silence was partly a function of the age at which he read London, and partly a function of the tendency to read political novels for their content and verisimilitude. As Wilding notes in his study of the political novel, there is a widespread tendency 'to emphasise the social, the naturalistic connections of political fiction. The assumption is that the political novel is a variety of nineteenth-century bourgeois realism' rather than a site of literary and political innovation.¹⁴⁶

La Guma's descriptions of the District Six of his childhood are noteworthy in at least three respects. Firstly, his fiction, journalism and autobiographical work are consistent in their representations of the District. They avoid the nostalgia of works such as Rive's *Buckingham Palace*, *District Six* – a nostalgia which Rive contradicts in his autobiographical *Writing Black*.¹⁴⁷ Secondly, they show that in some respects La Guma's views of his home environment were similar to those of outsiders, those for whom District Six and its inhabitants were a world apart. Thirdly, his reflections on his childhood suggest that the transition to what he saw as 'scientific socialism' through literature was accompanied by the hysteric's and the nineteenth century social reformer's horror at slum life. Yet the District was also or had been his home. For many other inhabitants of District Six crime and the informal sector provided a shared non-political identity in which he did not participate but only observed.¹⁴⁸ He was in it, but not of it. Indeed, La Guma's use of 'one' in the autobiographical pieces on which I have drawn shares features with Plomer's use of the indefinite personal pronoun. Plomer used 'one' to signify the distances he experienced between himself, the 'philistinism' of his 'own' upper class and the working class of Edwardian England.¹⁴⁹ Later we shall see that at times La Guma and the South African Coloured Peoples Organisation would struggle to come to terms with the often fragmentary nature of coloured social and political life, and to provide their constituency with an identity that could become part of a much broader political campaign aimed at national liberation.

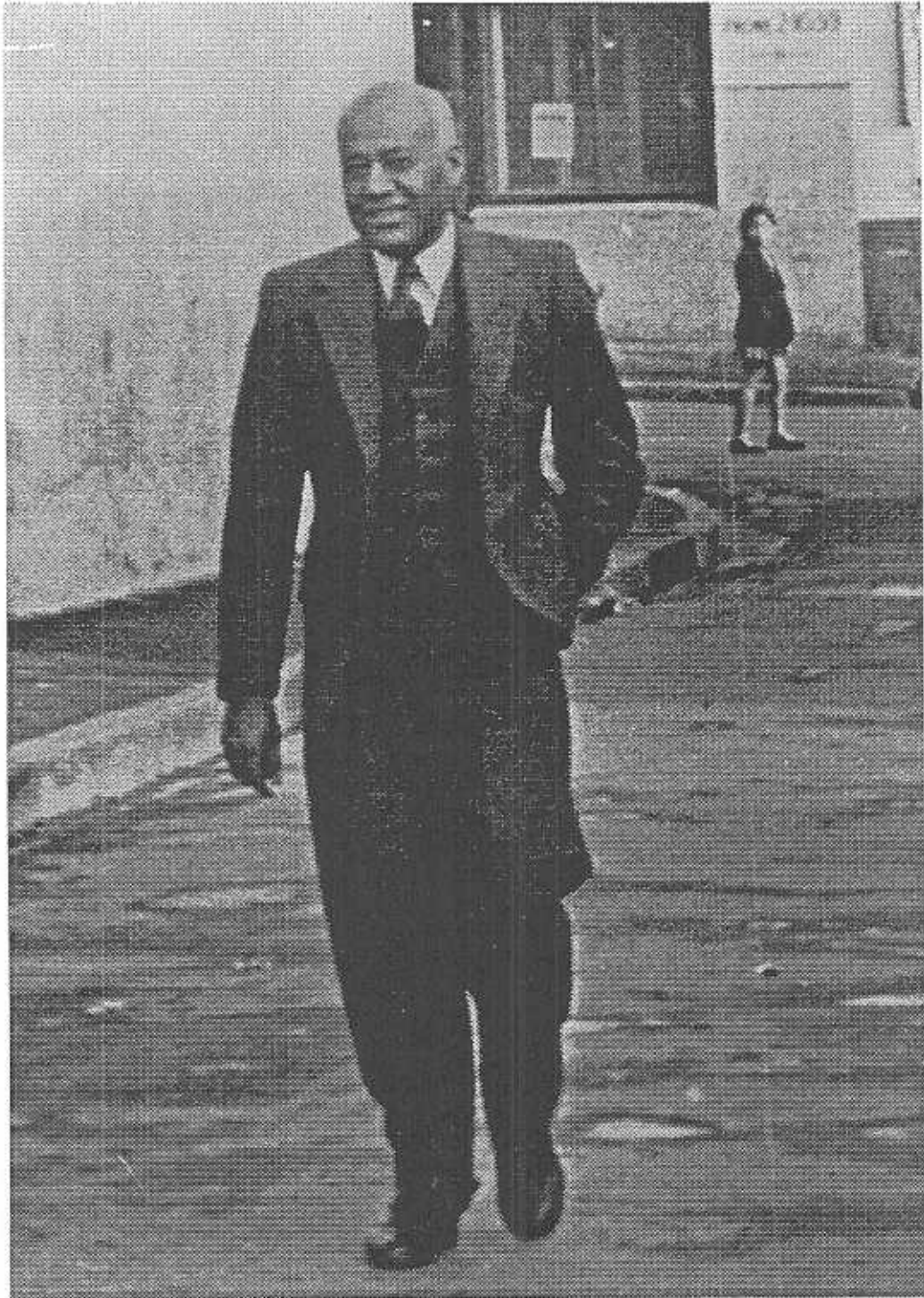


Fig. 2.1: Jimmy la Guma (Source: Mayibuye Centre)

SOUTH AFRICAN-INDIAN LIBERATOR
5 MAR 1937

The Liberator

A NON-EUROPEAN
ANTI-IMPERIALIST
MAGAZINE

EDITORIAL & PUBLISHING OFFICE
1 LONGMARKET STREET
CAPE TOWN


The Editors of the LIBERATOR
invite contributions. They
cannot however be held
responsible for M.S.S. sent
to them or undertake to
enter into correspondence
regarding rejected contri-
butions. Same will be
returned if stamped and
addressed envelope for
the purpose is enclosed

Subscription Rates
(Paid in Advance)

One year 3/6
Six months 2/-

Advertisement Rates

Inside Cover Page £2-10-0 p.a.
Outside " " 3-0-0
Pro-rata for smaller space



Official Organ of the National Liberation League of S.A.

Edited by J. A. La Guma. Sub-editor S. Lissianski
Business Manager: P. Morkel-Clemens

Designs & Reproductions by J. M. Brown, Jnr. & J. A. La Guma, Jnr.

Revised by A. P. G. of S. A. at above address.

Fig. 2.2: *The Liberator* Vol. 1, No. 1, (1937), p.1. The second-last line reads 'Designs and Reproductions by J.M. Brown, Jnr. & J.A. La Guma, Jnr.' (Source National Library of South Africa)

The Liberator

DARK
FOLKS,
ARISE.



Dark folks Arise! The long long night is over.
Faint in the East, behold the day appear.
Out of your evil dream of toil and sorrow,
Arise ye dark folks, for the day is here.
From each wretched slum, let the loud cry come,
Arise! ye dark folks, for the day is here.

By your young childrens eyes so red with weeping.
By their wan faces, filled with want and fear.
By the dark alleys, where your babes are creeping.
Naked of joy and all that makes life dear.
From each wretched slum, let the loud cry come.
Arise. ye dark folks for the day is here.

Forth then, ye heroes, patriots and lovers.
Brothers of danger, poverty and scorn.
Mighty in Faith of Freedom your great mother.
Giants refreshed in Joy's new rising morn.
Come and swell the song, silent now so long.
Dark folks are risen! and the Day is here!



Fig. 2.3: *The Liberator* Vol. 1, No. 1, (1937), p.17 (Source National Library of South Africa)

A SONG OF COURAGE.

Brave as a lion I must be,
To face this jeering world,
With my black face and rugged hair,
When every lip is curled
In bald derision as I pass,
A shadow on the looking-glass.

Braver than lions must I be
To give to child of mine
This heritage of certain scorn
A place amid the swine,
And bind him over to the sod
A tethered creature sorrow-shod.

Braver than all the brave must be
The race of men I bear,
Forged in the furnaces of hell
And wrought to Iron there.
The future years have need of them-
I sense it, though my sight is dim!

Georgia Douglas Johnson.

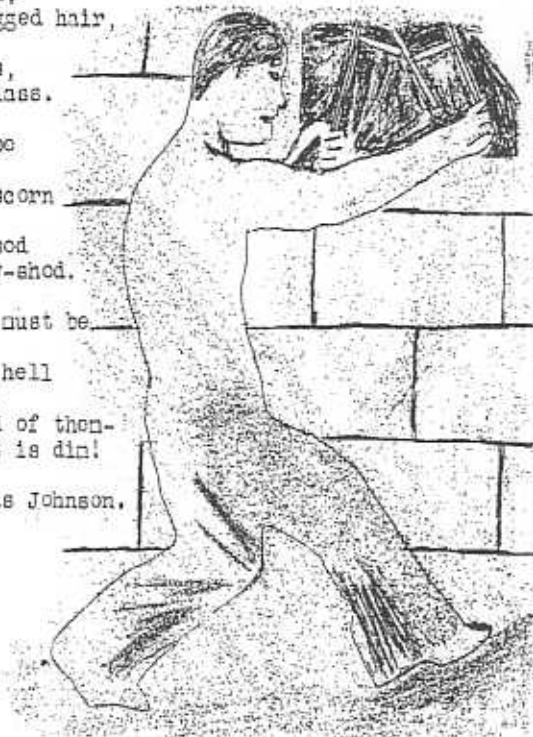


Fig. 2.4: *The Liberator* Vol. 1, No. 2, (1937), p.18 (Source National Library of South Africa)

Endnotes

¹ M. Klein, 'The Rôle of the School in the Libidinal Development of the Child', in M. Klein, *The Writings of Melanie Klein*, Vol. 1 (Hogarth Press, London, 1985), p. 59.

² La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 77; A. Lewis, 'Reflections on Education in District Six, 1930s to 1950s', in S. Jeppie and C. Soudien (eds), *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present* (Buchu Books, Cape Town, 1990), p. 186.

³ M. Adhikari, 'Let us live for our children': *The Teachers' League of South Africa, 1913-1940* (University of Cape Town Press, Cape Town, 1993), pp. 28-29; M. Horrell, *The Education of the Coloured Community in South Africa 1652-1970* (South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg, 1970), p. 36.

⁴ Lewis, 'Reflections on Education', p. 186; Horrell, *The Education of the Coloured Community*, p. 35; *Cape of Good Hope Education Gazette* (Department of Public Education, Cape Town, 1923), p. 37.

⁵ *Cape of Good Hope Education Gazette* (Department of Public Education, Cape Town, 1922), p. 30; *Cape of Good Hope Education Gazette* (Department of Public Education, Cape Town, 1934), pp. 31, 49; La Guma, 'The Real Picture', p. 19.

⁶ *The Sun*, 5 June 1936; Lewis, 'Reflections on Education', p. 187; M. Cross and L. Chisholm, 'The Roots of Segregated Schooling in Twentieth-Century South Africa', in M. Nkomo (ed.), *Pedagogy of Domination: Toward a Democratic Education in South Africa* (Africa World Press, Trenton, 1990), p. 44.

⁷ Klein, 'Early Stages of the Oedipus Conflict', p. 71; La Guma, 'The Real Picture', p. 17.

⁸ La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 77; *The Sun*, 7 May 1937.

⁹ *Cape Standard*, 24 January 1939.

¹⁰ La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 34; *Cape Standard*, 17 January 1939; K. McCormick, 'The Vernacular of District Six', in S. Jeppie and C. Soudien (eds), *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present*, pp. 92, 89.

¹¹ C. Michaels, 'An investigation into the standard of written English composition in the 6th standard of English-medium Coloured schools in the Cape Peninsula', (University of Cape Town, B.Ed. thesis, 1949), p. 91.

¹² McCormick, 'The Vernacular of District Six', pp. 99-100.

¹³ A.N.C. Veteran, 'Hamba Kahle Comrade Alex la Guma', *Sechaba*, January 1986, p. 30.

¹⁴ A. la Guma, quoted in C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. 13.

¹⁵ S. Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XVIII (Hogarth Press, London, 1955), pp. 3-64.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16; emphasis in original.

¹⁸ La Guma, 'The Real Picture', p. 19; M. Klein, 'Early Analysis', in M. Klein, *The Writings of Melanie Klein*, p. 87.

¹⁹ La Guma, 'The Real Picture', p. 19.

²⁰ Klein, 'Early Analysis', p. 81; Klein, 'Early Stages of the Oedipus Conflict', p. 71.

²¹ Klein, 'The Rôle of the School in the Libidinal Development of the Child', p. 81; Klein, 'Early Stages in of the Oedipus Conflict', p. 71; Ray Alexander, interview 23 June 1993.

²² In 1932 two directories listed Jimmy la Guma as an 'engineer': *Donaldson and Brady's Cape Town and Suburban Directory*, p. 441; *Dennis Edwards' Cape Town and Suburban Directory*, p. 351.

²³ La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 58.

²⁴ *The Sun*, 17 November 1933, 16 February 1934.

²⁵ Musson, *Johnny Gomas*, p. 77; *The Sun*, 24 July 1936; *Cape Standard*, 28 June 1937; *The Sun*, 2 July 1937.

- ²⁶ *The Sun*, 15 September 1933.
- ²⁷ *Cape Standard*, 28 June 1937.
- ²⁸ *The Sun*, 3 November 1937; La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 77.
- ²⁹ G. Manuel, *Kampvegters* (Nasou, Cape Town, 1967), p. 34; *The Sun*, 4 May 1934.
- ³⁰ *The Sun*, 7 September 1934, 11 May 1934, 18 May 1934.
- ³¹ *The Sun*, 9 November 1934, 3 May 1935; La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, pp. 58-59.
- ³² *The Sun*, 6 December 1935; G. Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, p. 188.
- ³³ *Cape Standard*, 1 March 1938, 31 June 1938.
- ³⁴ La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 58; Joan Dempers, interview 25 May 1993.
- ³⁵ *The Sun*, 4 March 1938; *Cape Standard*, 19 April 1938.
- ³⁶ *Cape Standard*, 28 March 1939; La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, pp. 66-67.
- ³⁷ P. Abrahams, *Tell Freedom* (Faber and Faber, London, 1954), pp. 280-281.
- ³⁸ Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, p. 192.
- ³⁹ *Cape Standard*, 1 March 1938; Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, pp. 76-77; Abrahams, *Tell Freedom*, p. 273; La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 68.
- ⁴⁰ *Cape Standard*, 17 January 1939.
- ⁴¹ *Cape Standard*, 31 October 1939; M. Fabre, *From Harlem to Paris: Black American Writers in France, 1840-1980* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1991), p. 148.
- ⁴² *Cape Standard*, 14 November 1939.
- ⁴³ Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, 195; Odendaal and Field (eds), *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 129; *Cape Standard*, 25 April 1939.
- ⁴⁴ *Cape Standard*, 8 August 1939.
- ⁴⁵ *Cape Standard*, 15 August 1939, 29 August 1939, 5 September 1939.
- ⁴⁶ *The Guardian*, 8 March 1940.
- ⁴⁷ *The Liberator*, 1, 1 (1937), p. 21; La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, pp. 62-63.
- ⁴⁸ *The Sun*, 20 November 1936, 15 March 1937.
- ⁴⁹ A. la Guma, *Time of the Butcherbird* (Heinemann, London, 1979); A. Wannenburg, 'Awendgesang', in R. Rive (ed.), *Quartet: Four Voices from South Africa* (Heinemann, London, 1982), pp. 23-32.
- ⁵⁰ *The Liberator*, 1, 1-5 (1937).
- ⁵¹ La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 61; La Guma, 'Why I joined the Communist Party', p. 50; Barto la Guma, interview 29 December 1996.
- ⁵² *The Liberator*, 1, 1 (1937); La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 60.
- ⁵³ *The Liberator*, 1, 1 (1937), p. 20 (original punctuation).
- ⁵⁴ J. A. la G., 'Golden Morn', *The Liberator*, 1, 4 (1937), p. 4 (original punctuation and stanza division).
- ⁵⁵ La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. ii.
- ⁵⁶ R. Kelley, "'Africa's Sons with Banner Red': African-American Communists and the Politics of Culture, 1919-1934", in S. Lemelle and R. Kelley (eds), *Imagining Home: Class, Culture and Nationalism in the African Diaspora* (Verso, London, 1994), pp. 35-37.
- ⁵⁷ J. la Guma, 'Down to the Masses' p. 2, 'We demand Social Equality!', pp. 9-10; C. Ziervogel, 'Rambles in South African Historical Byways' pp. 11-12; all in *The Liberator* 1, 1 (1937).
- ⁵⁸ R.A. Hill and G.A. Pirio, "'Africa for the Africans': the Garvey movement in South Africa, 1920-1940", in S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa* (Longman, London, 1987), p. 238.
- ⁵⁹ A. Cobby, *Class and Consciousness: The Black Petty Bourgeoisie in South Africa, 1924 to 1950* (Greenwood Press, New York, 1990), p. 187.
- ⁶⁰ Fabre, *From Harlem to Paris*, p. 139.
- ⁶¹ J.A. Rogers, *From Superman to Man*, in *The Liberator*, 1, (serialised novel) 1-5 (1937).
- ⁶² M. Honey (ed.), *Shadowed Dreams: Women's Poetry of the Harlem Renaissance* (Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1989).
- ⁶³ G.D. Johnson, 'A Song of Courage', *The Liberator*, 1, 2 (1937), pp. 19, 21.
- ⁶⁴ Honey (ed.), *Shadowed Dreams*, pp. 21, 32.

- ⁶⁵ *The Sun*, 11 February 1938, 1 March 1938; Paul Robeson, 'Robeson Faces the World', *The Liberator*, 1, 5 (1937), p. 16.
- ⁶⁶ *The Sun*, 5 April 1935, 12 April 1935, 30 August 1935, 13 November 1935, 15 January 1936, 2 July 1936, 18 February 1938, 1 March 1938.
- ⁶⁷ Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. 5.
- ⁶⁸ A. la Guma, 'Paul Robeson and Africa', in C. Abrahams (ed.), *Memories of Home* (Africa World Press, Trenton, 1991)p. 75.
- ⁶⁹ *Cape Standard*, 14 November 1939.
- ⁷⁰ S. Ismail, *Ashes of Meditation: A Book of Verse* (Arthur H. Stockwell, London, 1936); *The Sun*, 20 January 1933.
- ⁷¹ *The Sun*, 24 August 1936, 8 January 1937.
- ⁷² Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. 5; La Guma, *A Soviet Journey*, p. 223; La Guma, 'The Real Picture', p. 18; Rive, *Writing Black*, p. 9.
- ⁷³ *Cape Standard*, 31 December 1940; G. Manuel, *Kampvegters*, p. 32.
- ⁷⁴ La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 18.
- ⁷⁵ *The Sun*, 3 May 1935.
- ⁷⁶ *The Sun*, 28 October 1938.
- ⁷⁷ *The Guardian*, 9 June 1939; Abrahams, *Tell Freedom*, pp. 277, 270; R. van der Ross, 'A Political and Social History of the Cape Coloured People', Vol. 1 (University of Cape Town Archives, Unpublished typescript, 1973), p. 270; Blanche la Guma, interviews.
- ⁷⁸ *Cape Standard*, 31 January 1939.
- ⁷⁹ Abrahams, *Tell Freedom*, p. 197; Rive, *Writing Black*, p. 10.
- ⁸⁰ Rive, *Writing Black*, pp. 3, 7, 10; S. Gray, 'The long eye of history: four autobiographical texts by Peter Abrahams', *Pretexts* 2, 2 (1990), p. 105.
- ⁸¹ *Cape Standard*, 27 June 1939.
- ⁸² P. Abrahams, *Dark Testament* (1942) (Krauss Reprint, Nendeln, 1972), pp. 67-68.
- ⁸³ *Cape Standard*, 31 December 1940.
- ⁸⁴ Abrahams, *Tell Freedom*, p. 197; *The Guardian*, 31 December 1942.
- ⁸⁵ La Guma, 'The Real Picture', p. 18; La Guma, 'Why I Joined the Communist Party', p. 59.
- ⁸⁶ H. Bradford, *A Taste of Freedom: The ICU in Rural South Africa 1924-1930* (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1987), p. 126.
- ⁸⁷ *Cape Standard*, 5 December 1939.
- ⁸⁸ *Cape Standard*, 19 December 1939.
- ⁸⁹ Abrahams, *Dark Testament*, p. 38.
- ⁹⁰ *Cape Standard*, 13 November 1936.
- ⁹¹ *Cape Standard*, 7 August 1945.
- ⁹² C. Ziervogel, *Know This – Brown South Africa* (Stewart Publishing Company, Cape Town, 1939).
- ⁹³ *Cape Standard*, 2 December 1941; *The Sun*, 5 December 1941.
- ⁹⁴ *Cape Standard*, 5 December 1939, 23 January 1940, 27 August 1940, 4 December 1941.
- ⁹⁵ La Guma, 'The Real Picture', p. 19.
- ⁹⁶ *Cape Standard*, 22 October 1940.
- ⁹⁷ Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. vii; *Cape of Good Hope Education Gazette* (Department of Public Education, Cape Town, 1933-1938).
- ⁹⁸ La Guma, 'Doing Something Useful', p. 50; *Cape Standard*, 13 December 1938.
- ⁹⁹ *The Sun*, 14 March 1941.
- ¹⁰⁰ Based on my interviews with Clifford Cairns, Arthur Hendrickse, Stanley Brache, Percival Hardenberg, Cader Khatieb, Cornelius Kleinhaus, Aisha Osman (née Amlay) on 19 November 1996.
- ¹⁰¹ Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. 5; *Cape Standard*, 21 January 1941.
- ¹⁰² La Guma, 'Doing Something Useful', p. 51; *Cape Standard*, 11 March 1941.
- ¹⁰³ La Guma, 'Doing Something Useful', p. 51; H. Johnson, *The Socialist Sixth of the World* (Gollancz, London, 1939).

- ¹⁰⁴ La Guma, 'Why I Joined the Communist Party', p. 59.
- ¹⁰⁵ La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 71.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Cape Standard*, 7 November 1939, 14 November 1939, 5 December 1939; *The Sun*, 24 May 1940.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Cape Standard*, 28 May 1940.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Cape Standard*, 17 September 1940.
- ¹⁰⁹ *The Sun*, 21 June 1940.
- ¹¹⁰ A. la Guma, 'Identical Books', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 3.
- ¹¹¹ *Cape Standard*, 17 September 1940, 24 September 1940; La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 71.
- ¹¹² Van der Ross, 'A Political and Social History of the Cape Coloured People', p. 222.
- ¹¹³ *Cape Standard*, 23 January 1940; *The Guardian*, 14 January 1943; Joan Dempers, interview.
- ¹¹⁴ Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. 6; La Guma, 'Doing Something Useful', p. 51.
- ¹¹⁵ La Guma, 'Why I Joined the Communist Party', p. 60.
- ¹¹⁶ La Guma, 'Doing Something Useful', p. 51; La Guma, 'The Real Picture', p. 18; La Guma, 'Why I Joined the Communist Party', p. 60.
- ¹¹⁷ *Cape Standard*, 17 December 1940; A. la Guma, 'The Dead-End Kids of Hanover Street', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 9-11.
- ¹¹⁸ La Guma, 'The Real Picture', p. 18; La Guma, 'Why I Joined the Communist Party', p. 59; A. Mason, *The Courtship of Maurice Buckler* (Nash and Grayson, London, 1923).
- ¹¹⁹ *Cape Standard*, 18 May 1943, 25 May 1943.
- ¹²⁰ La Guma, 'Doing Something Useful', p. 50.
- ¹²¹ La Guma, 'Why I Joined the Communist Party', p. 57; La Guma, 'Doing Something Useful', p. 50.
- ¹²² La Guma, 'Why I Joined the Communist Party', p. 57.
- ¹²³ *Cape Standard*, 10 January 1939.
- ¹²⁴ *The Sun*, 10 May 1940; *Cape Standard*, 9 February 1943; *The Sun*, 18 October 1940; *Cape Standard*, 30 March 1943.
- ¹²⁵ *Cape Times*, 4 April 1949.
- ¹²⁶ La Guma, 'Why I Joined the Communist Party', p. 59.
- ¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 58.
- ¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.
- ¹²⁹ A. la Guma, 'Memories of Home', in C. Abrahams (ed.), *Memories of Home*, p. 34. Even a slum has to be constructed in language, and I must acknowledge my own role in the representation of La Guma's perceptions. In 'Doing Something Useful', published in 1982 and therefore written earlier, La Guma mentions a 'teeming limbo'. I have chosen the phrase 'teeming morass'. This appeared nine years later in *Imagining Home*, Cecil Abrahams' anthology of La Guma texts. Abrahams' conducted the interviews with La Guma which form the basis of his book *Alex la Guma* in 1978 and 1981, i.e. most probably before and during the time that he wrote 'Doing Something Useful'. On the assumption that the interviews gave La Guma the chance to refine political ideas and literary images that he had already articulated, I have used the phrase that appeared second. I assume that La Guma found the phrase 'teeming morass' more appropriate for three reasons: firstly, assonance links it to London's 'abyss'; secondly, 'limbo' implies a state of suspension while a 'morass' pulls one down and therefore has stronger links to the idea of a 'social pit' found in London's works; thirdly, the idea of 'morass' establishes a greater sense of conflict with the yearning for a 'more dynamic world'.
- ¹³⁰ La Guma, 'Why I Joined the Communist Party', p. 59 (original spelling).
- ¹³¹ See for instance J.M Coetzee, 'Man's Fate in the Novels of Alex la Guma'; G. Cornwell, 'Protest in fiction: an approach to Alex la Guma' (Rhodes University, M.A. thesis, 1979); V. Klima, *South African Prose Writing in English* (Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, Prague, 1971); A. JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa* (University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1983); B. Lindfors, 'Robin Hood Realism in South African English Fiction', *Africa Today*, XV, 4 (1968); B. Lindfors, 'Contradictory and Complementary Strategies of Protest in Alex la Guma's *A Walk in the Night*', *Afrique Australe*, 12

(1989); E. Mphahlele, 'South African Fiction and Autobiography', in B. Lindfors (ed.), *Contemporary Black South African Literature: A Symposium* (Three Continents Press, Washington, 1975); K. Petersen, 'South Africa', in B. King (ed.), *The Commonwealth Novel Since 1960* (Macmillan, London, 1991); P. Scanlon, 'Alex la Guma's Novels of Protest', *Okike*, 16 (1979).

¹³² La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 35; R. Whittemore, *Six Literary Lives: The Shared Impiety of Adams, London, Sinclair, Williams, Dos Passos and Tate* (University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 1993), p. 80.

¹³³ La Guma, *A Soviet Journey*, p. 23.

¹³⁴ F.C. Ball, *One of the Damned: the Life and Times of Robert Tressell Author of the Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1973), p. 16; S. Ingle, *Socialist Thought in Imaginative Literature* (Macmillan Press, London, 1979), p. 26.

¹³⁵ Whittemore, *Six Literary Lives*, p. 65.

¹³⁶ Ball, *One of the Damned*, pp. 41, 182, 185-186; R. Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (Paladin Books, London, 1991), p. 7; *The Guardian*, 6 July 1950.

¹³⁷ Ray Alexander, interview.

¹³⁸ F.C. Ball, *One of the Damned: the Life and Times of Robert Tressell Author of the Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, p. 21. Robert Noonan (Tressell's real name) married in Cape Town in 1891.

¹³⁹ La Guma, *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 62.

¹⁴⁰ J. London, *The People of the Abyss*, in *Jack London: Novels and Social Writings* (Library of America, New York, 1982), p. 181.

¹⁴¹ J. London, *The Iron Heel*, in *Jack London: Novels and Social Writings*, pp. 322, 340-341, 413.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 389; M. Wilding, *Political Fictions* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1980), pp. 91-92.

¹⁴³ See for instance B. Bunting, *The Rise of the South African Reich* (International Defence and Aid Fund, London, 1986).

¹⁴⁴ P. Stallybrass and A. White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Methuen, London, 1986), p. 130; London, *The People of the Abyss*, p. 10.

¹⁴⁵ London, *The People of the Abyss*, pp. 129, 159.

¹⁴⁶ Wilding, *Political Fictions*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁷ R. Rive, 'Buckingham Palace', *District Six* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1987); R. Rive, *Writing Black*.

¹⁴⁸ D. Pinnock, 'From Argie boys to skolly gangsters: the lumpen-proletarian challenge of the street-corner armies in District Six, 1900-1951', *Studies in the History of Cape Town*, Vol. III, p. 147.

¹⁴⁹ W. Plomer, *The South African Autobiography* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1984), p. 89; La Guma, 'Doing Something Useful', pp. 49-50.

Chapter Three

The honey of a satirical philosophy

This chapter begins in the late 1940s and ends in the middle 1950s. The need to find a political home for coloureds within the Congress movement contributed to the formation of the South African Coloured Peoples Organisation, and La Guma played an active part in the organisation. Its formation did not inhibit debate about the basis and nature of coloured identity: in fact, the debate continued inside and outside the organisation. While many participants drew on Stalin's definition of a nation, there was no 'Stalinist' resolution to the debate. In the early stages La Guma did not participate formally and directly in these debates, but they would inform his thinking on coloured history and political struggle. His energy went into politics, literature and journalism. He wrote long and short articles, and art reviews for *New Age*. He raised questions about the position of coloureds in South Africa's cultural and political life, and how derivative or indigenous this cultural life might be. He tied these questions to debates about the extent to which this culture was 'high' or 'low', and whether there was any guarantee of upward political and cultural development. Here we find his earliest published thoughts on the relationship between audience, nation and culture. They did not provide unequivocal answers.

In 1947, La Guma enrolled for life drawing classes at an art school known as the 'Contemporary Art School' or the 'District Six Art Group'. Classes took place at St Philip's School in Chapel Street, Woodstock, near the other end of Roger Street from where he lived. Later the art school moved to the coloured section of the Cape Technical College's racially segregated premises, the Roeland Street Extension, where two years earlier he had matriculated.¹ Higher up on the other side of Roeland Street was the jail that would feature in some of his early journalism and fiction. He would spend some time there, but not before life drawing and prison experiences had converged at the start of the Treason Trial.

When the classes moved to the Technical College, the instructor was John Coplans. At this time, Coplans studied under Maurice van Essche, whose own

'portraits of Malay and Coloured faces' *Advance* would favourably review in 1952.² This reception suggests that the school concentrated on realist representations of the body. It is also possible that nascent elements of Coplans' later interest in 'pop' artists like Lichtenstein and Warhol influenced La Guma, and encouraged the interest in comics that eventually led to *Little Libby – The Adventures of Liberation Chabalala*.³

Among La Guma's fellow students were the artist and writer Peter Clarke who later designed the cover for the first edition of *A Walk in the Night*, the sculptor Louis Maurice and the poet S.V. Petersen.⁴ Described by Jakes Gerwel as 'the first black Afrikaans poet', Petersen wrote in 'correct' Afrikaans rather than the non-standard varieties associated with the majority of coloured Afrikaans speakers. According to Hein Willemse, Petersen was concerned with 'recognition of his blood relationship with the Afrikaner, or if you prefer, the oppressor'.⁵ I shall be arguing later on that at times La Guma's use of non-standard Afrikaans and English was equally problematic, but for different reasons.

It is a matter of cold historical necessity

During the middle to late 1940s, La Guma was also a keen member of a socialist youth club. It had about 20 members who met regularly in Bloemhof Flats in District Six. A variety of political figures on the left such as Moses Kotane, John Gomas, Hosea Jaffe and his father Jimmy addressed the group. Unaffiliated to any party, most of its members supported the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM). This was also a time when La Guma read widely and intensely, discussing literary works with fellow club members. Among the authors they read were Dostoyevsky, Sholokhov, Zola, Steinbeck and Hemingway – all writers whom La Guma later included in reminiscences of his personal reading history and whose influence he has acknowledged in varying degrees. Studies of La Guma's influences by Chandramohan and Mkhize (among others) suggest that this is a fruitful area of scholarship.⁶ According to Irwin Combrinck, one of La Guma's close friends during this period before La Guma's perceived 'Stalinism' and Combrinck's support for the NEUM set them

on different paths, '[t]hose were the classics at the time, and we thought you were uneducated if you hadn't read *The Grapes of Wrath* or *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and the Spanish Civil War was of course politically interesting in our circles, and these novels gave it a more romantic dimension'.⁷

Demobilised in 1947, Jimmy rejoined the CPSA. According to Adhikari, his work now 'centred around organising political meetings in Cape Town and on the Cape Flats to promote socialism and to mobilise public opinion against racist laws'. Jimmy la Guma also stood as a CP candidate in the Cape Town Municipal elections against the incumbent, Ahmed Ismail, who had close ties with the United Party (UP). Again, Jimmy was defeated.⁸

After completing his matriculation exams in 1945, La Guma worked as a bookkeeper and then as a clerk at Caltex in 1947. While working there he took a 'correspondence course in journalism' and joined the Young Communist League (YCL).⁹ By his own much later account, identification with and espousal of the Party's aims and objectives preceded actual membership, implying that at heart he was already a communist because, as we have already seen, he was already perceived as one:

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... Around the corner from where I worked was the office of the Communist Party. A little nervously I climbed the narrow stairs. What responsibilities confronted me? It wasn't as if you were going to join a football club or a benefit lodge.¹⁰

La Guma's description of the narrow ascent to communism has an almost religious quality. In effect, he ascended from the more prosaic world of pleasure and short term advantage represented by sport and benefit societies to the more elevated level of concepts, longer term goals, and theory and political practice that characterised his father's world – so different from the 'lore of the mother'. This, too, accords with the later memory that his 'father lectured [him] on the

honour and importance of being known as a Communist'.¹¹ The secular theology implicit in his description conveniently ignores the more prosaic reality that his father's long association with the CPSA would have made him familiar with the demands and traumas of Party membership.

By this time, the YCL's activities in Cape Town seem to have declined from the high levels of the preceding years. While *The Guardian* did not advertise YCL meetings in Cape Town during 1947 there were numerous other regular events [see Fig. 3.1]. These included meetings on the Grand Parade at which his father had spoken, which he would soon address, and which he mentioned in *A Walk in the Night*, and weekly lectures at the People's College.¹² There were some things that a communist had to do:

I bought a leather coat and romantically called myself a 'revolutionary'.... In the YCL we read Lenin's works and debated youthfully and fervently. We sold papers and pamphlets to curious people who stood in shabby doorways and wondered at the ideas we preached.¹³

La Guma was soon putting pen to paper in support of the CPSA and the Soviet Union. His 1947 letter in the *Cape Standard* marking the CPSA's 26th anniversary is probably his first piece of adult journalism:

Part of a country's history is the rise of its political parties, and in every country in the world to-day history is being made by the Communist Parties. For this reason a class-conscious worker in this country can hardly allow an anniversary of the Communist Party of S.A. to pass unnoticed.

Without doubt Communism has been recognised as a power in the world to-day. The very fact that President Truman and Wall Street are doing their best to fight it is proof enough. That there are approximately twenty million Communists all over the world at present is another illustration of the power of Communism. It has come to stay,

despite the attacks of reaction...and the use of all other weapons in the hands of capitalism...

But Communism is not merely a matter of right, justice, liberty and fraternity; it is not "the voice of the Kremlin." It is a matter of cold historical necessity. Mankind has developed from a state of barbarism to its present level. It must advance further, towards the highest form of society.

South African reactionaries and other political renegades and Government stooges who speak of the "Communist menace" and the "Red bogey" are not even original in their tirades. Their story is so stale that it is not even worth mentioning... Here in South Africa the Communist idea is growing despite the attacks from all sides. Twenty-six years of the Communist movement has shown its effect upon the oppressed peoples of South Africa, and likewise upon the ruling class. When the Non-Europeans have achieved their national liberation, the march towards Socialism will be swifter.

Allow me, through your columns, to salute the movement. Forward for Socialism!¹⁴

Describing himself as 'a class-conscious worker' in South Africa, La Guma wrote with youthful fervour. Here he argues for a steady and linear series of transitions from barbarism to socialism, and equates an active role in the 'making' of history with the emergence of a Communist Party. When he separates 'national liberation' from 'Socialism', he confirms his commitment to the idea that one should establish socialism in one country rather than attempt international revolution. He also expresses support for the Comintern position on South Africa. His father was closely associated with this position, and in the future it would inform his own thinking on coloured identity and the role of national groups in the national liberation struggle. An echo of the 'Newtonian' approach to 'scientific socialism' that characterised Everhard's utterances in *The Iron Heel* which the previous chapter analysed, the letter also provides an

insight into La Guma's writing during the 1950s on the relationship between political and cultural progress. In 1948, he joined the CPSA.¹⁵

The National Party's election victory in June 1948 accelerated and intensified the process of segregation that already regulated many aspects of life in South Africa.¹⁶ In Cape Town, initial attempts to introduce 'petty apartheid' on the trains encountered resistance from the Train Apartheid Resistance Committee (TARC). While surviving contemporaries remember La Guma's participation in TARC, formed in 1948, there is no documentary evidence to support his involvement. It is possible they confused father and son. As part of its campaign, TARC leaders ignored the racial allocation of compartments. Jimmy was one of 14 charged with contravening train segregation legislation.¹⁷ In the end, the case against them could not proceed. At that stage, 'no definition had been laid down by law to guide the railway ticket examiner in his duties of separating the Coloured from the European on the trains'. This vindicated the *Cape Standard's* assertion some nine years earlier that there was no 'legal definition' of the term 'coloured' that the government of the day could apply.¹⁸

Extensive segregation measures were already in place, but the National Party (NP) decided to extend racial divisions even further. During its first two years in power, it passed three laws that confirmed its intention to define races and prevent racial integration. These were the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, the Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Act. Though the NP was merely continuing an already well-advanced legislative process, these three laws were significant. They would radically affect all aspects of life for Indians and coloureds living in towns and cities, because they heralded the destruction and dispersal of racially mixed communities throughout South Africa.¹⁹ The Population Registration Act aimed to define 'racial' groups. As we shall see, during the 1950s and 1960s the state was not the only political actor in search of a definition of the term 'coloured'. This search would be intimately connected to the history of liberation politics in the Western Cape and the literary expressions that accompanied it.

In 1949 Alex la Guma, Sam Kahn, Brian Bunting, Moses Kotane, Ike Horvitch and H.A. Naidoo shared the platform at a May Day rally on Cape

Town's Grand Parade. La Guma's presence there appears to contradict the claim in *Sechaba* that politically he 'went through a very lean period after the Nationalist Party came to power in 1948' or that he cut all ties with political organisations.²⁰ There is no record of La Guma's contribution to this event. However, among the resolutions adopted at the meeting was one which called on 'African and Coloured workers to form local committees to defend their franchise rights' which were now under further threat in the Cape Province.²¹ In later years, La Guma would play an active part in the debate about their political significance. Two years before the rally, the Cape Town District Committee of the CPSA had stated that it had 'no intention of adopting a boycott' of the forthcoming elections. It had encouraged efforts to ensure that all potential coloured voters were registered. At the same time, though, Moses Kotane had called for a boycott of the elections organised under the Representation of Natives Act.²² This two-pronged strategy was not inconsistent. However, as we shall see, it did create the conditions for later divisions and confusions about the correct response to encroachments on the Cape Province's limited coloured franchise in 1957.

You never do that!

Life was not all politics. The YCL organised weekly 'bob hops' to raise funds and La Guma used to visit clubs where he re-established contact with Blanche Herman. At this stage, according to Blanche, 'there was nothing serious' and they lost contact for a while.²³

However, 'one day' in 1954, Blanche Herman was walking down Adderley Street in central Cape Town when she bumped into him. She had completed her training as a nurse and domiciliary midwife at St Monica's maternity home in the Bo-Kaap, where she been working since then:

It was the end of the month, I was going to get a few items while off duty, and I met Alex in Adderley Street. He was at that time working at Caltex as a clerk. We were very glad to see each other; we hadn't seen each other for a long time, and stood speaking. I never reached the

shop.... and I said 'Oh, I have to get back to the hospital because my shift is on soon' and he said 'When do I see you again?' and I said 'Oh we'll knock up against each other again'. I wasn't interested in him at all, and he said 'No that's not good enough... can I see you on Sunday?'He lived in District Six with his family.... So then as a practical type of person I thought it was ridiculous that he has to come up all the way from District Six to fetch me, madam.... I can come down. My friend at the hospital said to me 'You never do that! He's supposed to fetch you!'²⁴

Blanche met Alex at Castle Bridge, the gateway to District Six that appears in the first line of an early article 'The Dead-End Kids of Hanover Street' and the second line of *A Walk in the Night*. From there he took her to his parents' house in Roger Street for afternoon tea: 'And we started going out from then.... We were just at his house for half an hour when he proposes marriage.' She accepted.²⁵

The two families had known each other for some time. Blanche's mother had worked for Jimmy during one of his campaigns for a seat on the Cape Town City Council. She had also been a 'queue leader' in the Christmas parcel savings scheme organised for *The Guardian* by John Morley, whom Jimmy had known since his participation in the NLL. Before the start of her relationship with Alex, Blanche had been politically involved, selling political literature to people passing down Klipfontein Road:

I was known as one of the best sales ladies because I would jump onto the running boards of the cars, stop the car, and make them buy my literature, and I got rid of all the literature for a penny or tuppence or whatever people had.... so they [the La Gumas] sort of knew me and my family, so I was very welcome, having been involved in doing... little odds and ends... in that field.²⁶

A far more athletic person than her husband, throughout their relationship Blanche's practicality and determination complemented Alex's interest in literature, art and politics. This does not mean that she was not politically involved or active. My thesis will show that Blanche was never merely the wife of Alex la Guma. Like Wilhelmina in relation to Jimmy, Blanche was the one who ensured there was food on the table while Alex, like his father before him, tried to form the outlook of those he loved by guiding their literary and political interests up a graded path in a direction he thought suitable:

He would always give me books to read, because I'd be on duty.... At that stage Alex was already into the heavier material, I mean he was a Communist already then.... Some of that reading was very heavy for my standard at that time. So it was lighter books at that time – Hemingway and a variety... also Greene I think... and we would talk about the books... nothing like Dostoyevsky or that field...²⁷

La Guma might have constituted himself as the arbiter of taste, but Blanche brought her own cultural experiences and interests to their relationship:

He was very fond of cinema and Westerns... *High Noon* [1952] was one of them... We played music on the record player... Alex was fond of the guitar and he would strum away at folk music, and American folk music as well... and of course the Cape coloured songs – the *ghoemaliedjies*... nothing serious... As a younger child I used to go to the City Hall with my mother, but Alex and I never went... I think at that stage we had apartheid coming in... He was interested in all music and said 'Don't become snobbish'... He didn't really go for pop but he was a great jazz fan. Benny Goodman was his man...²⁸

The story of La Guma's marriage repeats aspects of the story of his father's marriage. Their partners had fathers who accepted their daughters' choice of partner but were concerned that their prospective husbands' political

involvement would prevent them from adequately supporting their prospective wives. Jimmy had to wait until Wilhelmina's father had died, while Blanche's father eventually accepted the marriage on condition that La Guma agreed to a church wedding.²⁹ However, other choices and compromises followed. Blanche la Guma recalls:

When we got married he said to me, 'Maybe you'd like to continue your studies', because it was always a matter of not having enough money to continue on at school. I was interested in nursing and medicine, so he said 'Maybe you'd like to do medicine', and it was then that I said 'Medicine or a family: I'd rather have a family'. So then I said 'Maybe you'd like to continue further in painting, in the art world. Maybe you'd like to go to university and do some art, and I will help to work towards it'. And he said to me then 'No, I think I'd like to be a writer'... And then [later] during the time of the... Coloured People's Congress came the election [to the Cape Town City Council], and the organisation asked him to stand... and he said he'd like to pursue his writing.³⁰

La Guma may have preferred writing and is most widely known as a novelist, but as the last chapter will show, his paintings played an important part in his private life.

After the marriage in 1954, there was considerable tension between father and son. Alex felt that Jimmy was treating him as if he was a child, and would not acknowledge his right to form his own political opinions. The cramped living conditions at Roger Street could not have helped much. At Blanche's suggestion, the couple moved to the home of her widowed mother in Gleemoor, Athlone. There they had two rooms to themselves.³¹ With the move away from District Six and Jimmy, La Guma's level of political activity increased and his political profile acquired its own identity, though he and his father did not necessarily tread different political paths.

Our future lies in our own hands

In 1950, the CPSA dissolved itself before it could be banned under the Suppression of Communism Act. La Guma was listed as a 'known communist'. The Liquidator appointed by the government sent out letters to former Party members or supporters. *The Guardian* reported that 'persons on the "blacklist" [could] be ordered to resign from public bodies...resign their posts and even give up their membership in any organisations to which they [might] belong'.³² Though free to continue with other political work, the 'listing' was the first in a series of restrictions that would eventually see him a banned person, under twenty-four hour house arrest and detained without trial for 180 days. The Suppression of Communism Act was an ominous development that clarified the National Party's intentions. The steadily worsening political situation also intensified the search for new ways to continue the national liberation struggle. The ANC already represented Africans and its relations with the Natal and Transvaal Indian Congresses had been formalised since 1947.

Launched in early 1951, initially the Franchise Action Council (FRAC) was not a national organisation. Nor was it the only organisation concerned with encroachments on the already limited coloured franchise in the Cape Province. Unlike the War Veterans' Torch Commando, however, FRAC was not concerned with defence of the constitution and limited coloured franchise rights in the Cape Province in the context of white 'guardianship'. According to *Sechaba*, La Guma was involved in the organisation, though again there is no corroborating evidence.³³ Like the NLL before it, all race groups could join FRAC. In practice, its primary aim was to represent coloured political interests. According to Lewis, FRAC brought together a wide spectrum of political activists. They ranged from figures previously associated with the Party such as Fred Carneson to moderates such as Richard van der Ross. FRAC even received support from the Coloured People's National Union (CPNU) whose members sat on the government-appointed Coloured Advisory Council. Like TARC, FRAC received no support from the NEUM.³⁴

In 1951, FRAC organised a mass strike in response to the pressures felt by coloured workers as the government introduced policies that favoured white

workers. It had some success in schools in the Western Cape where it challenged the dominance of the NEUM. Its contribution to the 1952 Defiance Campaign was less successful.³⁵ This presaged two significant aspects of coloured politics during the fifties and sixties with which La Guma would have to deal: the unwillingness of many coloureds to become politically involved in national issues; the often fragmented, sectarian and parochial nature of coloured politics in the Western Cape.³⁶ According to Richard van der Ross, there was a real possibility that the conservative and pro-UP CPNU would become the only national coloured political voice. In response to this, coloureds in different parts of South Africa perceived the need for a more radical political organisation that would work with Africans and Indians. *Return to Goli – Peter Abrahams’* record of his brief return to South Africa in 1952 – mentions James Phillips’ plans ‘to launch a Coloured organisation and paper that would bring the Coloureds together so that they could take their stand with the Blacks and Indians in the struggle that was taking shape’.³⁷ In the Cape, a group that once again included figures as politically diverse as Edgar Deane, Van der Ross, Reg September and John Gomas facilitated the formation of the South African Coloured Peoples Organisation (SACPO) in September 1953. There was extensive debate about whether the organisation that became SACPO should have the word ‘Coloured’ in its title. In the end the word stayed, according to Van der Ross, in order to achieve a situation where an acknowledged Coloured political organisation ‘could liaise at top-level with Black, Indian and White organisations of similar views’.³⁸

The more conservative opinion articulated by the CPNU and George Golding warned coloureds not to unite with Africans and Indians politically. The CPNU claimed that ‘the Coloured people have always stood side by side with the Europeans in building up South Africa’. By contrast, SACPO’s leaders were willing to work with the ANC, and it joined the Congress Alliance shortly afterwards.³⁹ In March 1954, Stanley Lollan represented SACPO at the National Action Council that met to plan the Congress of the People.⁴⁰ The ANC welcomed the formation of SACPO. The report of its National Executive acknowledged the context within which it saw ‘national organisations’

contributing to the national liberation struggle, but expressed some concern that insufficient numbers of coloureds and whites were involved:

...Our policy of co-operating with other racial groups through their national organisations has made great strides and constitutes a very real threat to the present regime which is anchored in the idea of racial exclusiveness and domination. In the fight against fascism we must see to it that more and more of the other groups are part and parcel of the struggle. The Africans as the leading element in this alliance must do all they can to see that the Coloureds are really part of this fight, similarly with the Europeans. The Indian people led by the SAIC... are old and trusted allies.⁴¹

From the mid 1950s La Guma did all he could to make coloureds 'really part of this fight'. The problem that he and others in SACPO faced was that while the National Party's policies precipitated what Goldin has termed a 'massive alienation of Coloured people from the government', at this stage the registered coloured electorate was not uniformly alienated from the UP, SACPO's main electoral rival during the 1950s.⁴² In general, coloureds retained a position of privilege relative to Africans and were themselves economically and politically divided in their responses to the imposition of apartheid and the further reduction of their already limited political rights.

In May 1955, SACPO launched its Western Cape Area Council with George Peake as chairperson and Reg September as secretary. In addition to improving its organisational capacity and preparing for the Congress of the People, it faced several important issues. These included state implementation of the Group Areas Act of 1950, the prospect that coloureds would lose their already limited franchise rights and the implementation of bus apartheid.⁴³ In the following month, La Guma chaired a Congress Alliance meeting on the Grand Parade that protested against these issues. Here he criticised those who retained faith in the UP and stressed the importance of extra-parliamentary activity:

It is regrettable that the so-called opposition in the House of Parliament has not turned to those people who can be most effective in the struggle – the Non-European people. Our future does not lie with those in Parliament. Our future lies in our own hands, [in] the strength of our organisation.⁴⁴

Later that week he was one of 18 delegates elected to represent SACPO at the Congress of the People to draw up what he described at the time as 'a blue print of the future South Africa towards which we are marching'.⁴⁵ SACPO delegates intended to put forward 'some 35 demands covering every aspect of the people's life'.⁴⁶ Interviewed by *New Age* in his capacity as SACPO vice-chair, La Guma hoped that 'the example set by many other Coloured people who are attending will be an inspiration to their people to come closer to the struggle for democracy in South Africa'. Their send-off included a torchlight rally on the Grand Parade, but of the region's 80-90 delegates, 50-60 were detained at Beaufort West, among them La Guma. In Beaufort West, they organised their own meeting to coincide with the opening of the Congress in Kliptown. Only about six, including Alf Wannenburg, one of the other three contributors to the *Quartet* anthology that appeared eight years later, got through from Beaufort West to Kliptown.⁴⁷

From April 1955 subcommittees of the National Action Council had been categorising the demands received while the participating organisations were organising their delegations. Next, a drafting committee produced the Charter based on the subcommittees' work. Attended by some 3 000 delegates, a large contingent of armed policemen disrupted the second day of the Congress. The police confiscated all the documents that they could find. They also declared that the delegates were contemplating treason and took down all their the names and addresses. In September the following year the police conducted nationwide raids on many of those involved in the Congress Alliance or present at Kliptown, again removing many documents.⁴⁸ Arrests in December that year

and January 1956 would follow, leading to the marathon trial of 156 South Africans on charges of high treason.

The success of the Congress of the People depended in part upon the successful mobilisation and collection of political demands, and upon the relationships between perceived racial and cultural groups as represented by national organisations within the Congress Alliance. It depended in part upon the popularisation of a particular posing and resolution of the National Question as a route to national liberation. Here it is necessary to touch on the relations between the National Question, the two-stage revolutionary thesis and the theory of 'colonialism of a special type'.

We are not yet a nation

The Sixth Comintern congress of 1928 had put forward a resolution on South Africa. This resolution included a proposal that the CPSA 'must combine the fight against all anti-native laws with... the slogan of an independent native South African republic as a stage towards a workers' and peasants' republic, with full equal rights for all races, black, coloured and white'.⁴⁹ From its eventual acceptance and the corollary of a two-stage thesis of revolution, several consequences followed. These included moves to ensure that the CP became more representative of the most exploited sections of South African society; CP support for the ANC as a nationalist organisation; recognition that while different racial groups experienced different levels of oppression they should be treated identically and that they should all enjoy the same level of economic development while their cultural differences should be preserved.

Analysis of the economic conditions out of which the Native Republic Thesis as a political stage could emerge led much later in a different direction – towards the 'colonialism of a special type' thesis. Some of Jimmy la Guma's writings from the mid 1930s suggest that the thesis was taking shape in an environment to which his son had direct access. In 1936, nine years after his meeting with Bukharin, Jimmy had used his *Plain Politics for the Oppressed Peoples* column in *The Sun* to describe South Africa as 'an "imperialism within an imperialism"'. Firstly, British imperialism with its connections oversea and

concerned with... the profits to be derived from the exploitation of the colonial peoples' and/but, secondly, 'held back by the Boer imperialist'.⁵⁰ By the mid 1950s there was a more explicit link between resolution of the national question and issues of economic and political development. In 1954, Michael Harmel distinguished 'two nations in South Africa occupying the same state side by side in the same area. White South Africa is a semi-dependent imperialist state: Black South Africa is its colony'.⁵¹

Accompanying the evolution of these ideas was the conviction that the Soviet Union's resolution of its national question provided a model for South Africa. A.J. Adams, a member of the South African Friends of the Soviet Union, visited Azerbaijan in 1937. There he noticed 'many dark-skinned people' who 'in facial features and colour, resemble very much our Cape Malays'. He remarked that 'Coloured men and women' held important political positions.⁵² Thirteen years later Walter Sisulu commented on 'one of the national republics in Trans-Caucasia'. He observed that:

What we saw convinced us that the development of the former backward areas inhabited by the minorities is one of the most remarkable achievements of modern times: the transformation of deserts and wilderness into arable land... of women who for centuries wore the veil into free citizens; of a country once torn by national strife into a family of friendly nations.

This is the story too of the success of the Soviet nationalities policy. Consistently applied to the once oppressed areas of the Tsarist Empire, it transformed them from colonies into free and equal members of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.⁵³

These texts indicate that the application of the Soviet Union's resolution of the national question to South Africa defined as a 'colonialism of a special type' establishes levels of economic, political and cultural development, characterises regions by the degrees of exploitation they suffer, and clearly distinguishes

national majorities and minorities. How many national groups and minorities South Africa contained, and how one defined them, was another question.

In 1954, the year that saw formation of the Congress Alliance and one year after the formation of SACPO, two left-wing clubs in Cape Town organised a symposium on the National Question. K.A. Jordaan, one of the participants, described the National Question as 'the internal arrangements of the South African State'. The symposium dealt in part with the questions of whether and/or in what way coloureds constituted a national group, and whether it was possible to discuss the question of coloured identity without sharing terminology with the National Party. According to Goldin, the 'symmetry of apartheid... demanded the forging of a Coloured "nation"' – as did the symmetry of the liberation struggle – and yet 'it was widely recognised that a national identity did not exist among the Coloured.'⁵⁴ However, the Congress Alliance would have little chance of mobilising coloureds and drawing them to its vision of a new South Africa if it refused to examine the basis and constituents of coloured identity at that time – whatever their source.

Several participants drew on Stalin's definition of a nation as 'a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory and economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture', but this did not guarantee identical definitions of coloured identity. Jordaan argued that a national group was 'a people who, by virtue of their common racial, geographical or linguistic antecedents consider themselves or are considered to be a distinct or separate racial entity' and that 'the Africans, the Coloureds, the Indians and the Afrikaners can be regarded as national groupings'. In concrete terms, he argued, 'African, Indian and Coloured South Africans are oppressed by the British, Afrikaner and Jewish South Africans'. Jack Simons stressed the National Party's contribution to this identity. 'We all know', he said, that 'efforts are now being made to transform the Coloured people into a "nation" by the Group Areas Act, Population Registration Act, Mixed Marriages Act, a Coloured Affairs Department and the rest of the segregation paraphernalia'. In setting out his objections to Jordaan he questioned whether coloureds at that

time constituted a national group and suggested that what identity they had was increasingly a function of apartheid legislation.⁵⁵

During the mid 1950s several reviews and assessments of art, literature and drama in *Fighting Talk* took up the National Question.⁵⁶ In July 1954, Lipman argued that South African painters should display less 'cosmopolitanism' and more "'national consciousness'". In other words, they should display 'some particular interpretation of local and national features which go to stamp a work of art with the unmistakable imprint of the people and land which form the immediate environment'.⁵⁷ If political and economic factors determined national consciousness, then South African artists could not be expected to display 'the full maturity of national consciousness... due to the fact that we [South Africans] are not yet a nation but a political, social and economic state with a number of national groups as yet not welded into that stable community one can call a nation'. Lipman's use of 'national' and 'national groups' differs from the interpretations of Jordaan and Simons, for it implies that national groups precede and in some respects are antagonistic to the formation of a nation, while Jordaan and Simons do not see an *a priori* conflict between the two. The idea that Afrikaners constituted a 'national grouping' in Lipman's sense implied that they required a literature to represent them in the development of a national consciousness. This might have provided the context for two Herman Charles Bosman stories in *Fighting Talk* during 1958.⁵⁸ Later I shall argue that La Guma's fiction between the late 1950s and early 1960s inherited these dual aspects of national groups viewed as already defined in the interests of mobilisation or exclusion, and uncertainty about identities not yet fully formed.

The combination of external and intersubjective definitions of race and culture had at least three consequences for the way in which the Congress Alliance could approach coloured identity. Firstly, where the characteristics of a national group such as coloureds were assessed synchronically, this could deflect attention away from factors such as the Coloured Labour Preference Policy (CLPP). Originally proposed in 1935 by the moderate Coloured-European Council to protect coloured workers from cheaper African migrant

labour, the CLPP sought to reduce the African population of the southern Cape and obliged employers to prefer coloured over African workers in the area to the west of the 'Eiselen Line' that stretched from Kimberley to Humansdorp.⁵⁹ If the policy ultimately failed to keep out Africans, it nevertheless has had a profound impact on the formation of the region's coloured working class and its relationship with the National Party and its successors. While La Guma's articles such as 'The Machine' written in 1956 and others in 1957 criticised influx control, a corollary of the CLPP, it seems that on the basis of Stalin's notion of a 'community of culture', coloureds could be seen to have a 'right' to the southern and western Cape.⁶⁰ Secondly, where political factors and the interventions of the National Party were acknowledged as the only source of identity, the result was rejection of a coloured identity because it was seen as an apartheid creation.

The third consequence of this approach was the emergence of a notion of coloured identity within SACPO that overlooked or attempted to play down the potential consequences of class divisions within the organisation's constituency. If SACPO does not appear to have acknowledged or resolved these problems at this stage, two reasons stand out. Politically, adherence to the two-stage theory placed stronger emphasis on nations and national liberation in the first stage through which South Africa had yet to pass. Secondly, it is possible that in his journalism and speeches La Guma chose not to highlight the complementary strategies of African influx control and coloured labour preference for fear this might increase coloured support for the United Party which combined a limited coloured franchise with segregation policies. The proceedings of SACPO's 1957 national conference, at which La Guma was elected onto the national executive committee, lend some support to this view. Conference documents suggest that SACPO did not mention the CLPP. Instead it attacked the Industrial Conciliation Act which enabled the state to 'reserve any kind of work...in a specific area...for workers of a particular race', placing particular emphasis on the removal of coloured workers and their replacement by whites.⁶¹

In this respect, SACPO's constituency consisted of intellectuals and relatively skilled workers rather than those in semiskilled or unskilled sectors

who would face direct competition from African workers. The consequences of this concern were evident at its 1959 congress when it became the Coloured People's Congress (CPC), and acknowledged that it had not yet brought into the Alliance the 'factory workers and members of the lower income groups among the Coloured people'.⁶² Perhaps SACPO's political balancing act in the late 1950s was unavoidable as it sought to resolve the conflicts and contradictions between discourses that posited the existence of national groups but provided the Congress Alliance and SACPO with a problematic notion of coloured identity – not just in the sense that this identity was in the making but in the sense that the basis on which it could be constructed was in doubt.

The existence of separate, racially defined congresses such as the ANC, the Congress of Democrats (COD) and SACPO was often justified on the grounds of security and practicality since racial groups already lived in separate areas. However, the issue went beyond convenience factors since La Guma's literary and political career was shaped by questions of how and when to define coloured identity, and the question of when being coloured mattered confronted him and SACPO a little more than a month after the Congress of the People. In June 1955, *New Age* reported that one of the demands that SACPO delegates planned to take to the Congress of the People was that '[t]he major long-term outcome of the Congress of the People should be the final merger of the four main organisations in the camp of liberation into a composite whole'.⁶³ This could imply that coloured identity itself was problematic or that coloured identity within a 'composite whole' was less problematic than the existence of separate national organisations based on racial distinctions that were hard to separate completely from their apartheid associations. Two months after the Congress, a Western Regional Council meeting reported on a 'well attended meeting' addressed by La Guma and George Peake held 'to protest against the classification of Coloureds as Africans in Johannesburg'. The minutes also record that La Guma supported an Executive Committee meeting resolution 'that Mr Hjul be asked to withdraw from the Regional Council, since it was not compatible with the character of S.A.C.P.O. that Europeans hold positions on leading Committees'. On the issue of reclassification, Lodge notes that

while 'coloureds were responding to the threat of losing privileges which differentiated them from Africans, those events nevertheless served to strengthen the argument of those who advocated a multiracial campaign' since the ultimate goal was equal rights for all. For his part Hjul, a Liberal Party member, felt that being 'asked to resign from the Area Council...because the Executive committee decided that a European should not be allowed to hold office in S.A.C.P.O.... goes against the very principles on which S.A.C.P.O. was founded'.⁶⁴ In some respects, both sides were being disingenuous. La Guma's support for the Soviet Union was well known, and in January 1955 Hjul had resigned from the Cape Town committee for the Congress of the People in protest at perceived attempts by COD, the Congress Alliance organisation specifically for whites, to 'align the nationalist movement with the Soviet bloc in the Cold War'.⁶⁵ It appears that La Guma's motion was accepted. Hjul's direct contact with SACPO seems to have ended at this point.

Initially a relatively small number of personnel in SACPO held key positions at local and national levels. In June 1954, Reg September became the organisation's General Secretary, and in May 1955 George Peake and Reg September were elected chair and secretary of the Western Cape Area Council. In about September 1955 La Guma became SACPO National Chairman. In October 1956, soon after his first by-lined article for *New Age* on coloured life and culture, he became General Secretary and Reg September became National Chairman.⁶⁶

As a member of SACPO's local executive committee, La Guma spoke at meetings during 1955 and 1956 in and around Cape Town. Many took place on the city's Grand Parade:

We have reached a stage where we are no longer satisfied with [the] half-hearted, luke-warm and coward[ly] opposition that is taking place in Parliament today. The people have rejected the United Party and the so-called Liberal Party. The people are beginning to realise that the struggle for freedom must be waged by themselves.... We coloured people at the same time are taking a lesson from what is happening to

the African people, but we are prepared to stand shoulder to shoulder with them in the struggle against pass laws. To hell with the passes... we have shown the Coloured people the only way to liberation. We must from now on decide to get our backs up and fight.... The Freedom Charter will not come in a day, it will come only through hard work and [the] struggle of the people... We of the South African Coloured Peoples Organisation say it is better to fight like a lion than to be led to the slaughter like a sheep.⁶⁷

Directed at generating support for the Freedom Charter and the Congress Alliance, his speeches stressed that coloureds could become part of the liberation struggle through SACPO.

La Guma was also responsible for the organisation's links with *New Age*.⁶⁸ This prepared him for the transition to journalism for *New Age*, though he never left politics behind. Cecil Abrahams gives several reasons for La Guma's appointment: the paper's 'liberal-minded white' owners wanted to extend readership beyond their own 'cultural and intellectual background'; to achieve their political goals they 'sought staff within the black community. Since La Guma was an active participant in the shaping of the Cape colored community, and... had demonstrated in *The Guardian* [a predecessor to *New Age*] his competence as a writer, he was chosen'.⁶⁹ Whether *New Age* was as instrumental, its owners so 'liberal-minded' or La Guma so active and powerful in moulding a community and so passive on the issue of job opportunities, is debatable. Abrahams seems to have overlooked the fact that La Guma's direct or indirect association with the CPSA, TARC, FRAC, SACPO and the Congress Alliance had already brought him into contact with many who worked for the paper. There were other pressing reasons. At this stage, Blanche had two jobs. She was still working at St Monica's, and since their marriage she had been trying to start up a private midwifery practice on the Cape Flats:

When we got married I continued working there [St Monica's] while trying to build up a practice in Athlone because I was now going to try

doing private midwifery... He worked at Caltex until I was already expecting Eugene... Alex then worked for the South African Coloured Peoples Organisation... At this stage I'm pregnant with Eugene and he worked for them as a full time organiser but there was no income... he never got a salary. So at about seven month's... [December 1955] I couldn't work much anymore... We had a chat and I said 'It's impossible'... He then gave up that work and went to work at *New Age*.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, Abrahams' account has value. He raises the question of La Guma's intended audience, which in turn has implications for the ways in which he would represent race in general and coloured identity in particular in three closely related areas – politics, journalism and fiction.⁷¹

Campaigns around threats to the coloured vote and the implementation of the Group Areas Act continued with varying success. Despite the sense of collective outrage and the potential for collective mobilisation, even by the late fifties, as one of La Guma's articles on forced removals from Tramway Road in Sea Point shows, opposition to perceived political interference from SACPO and the Liberal Party remained strong.⁷² There was little organised physical resistance to forced removals – one of the most brutal and traumatic aspects of apartheid. According to Lewis, the Group Areas Coordinating Committee under Richard van der Ross 'flooded the Board with mass representations opposing the Act'. These had no effect. The following year the Board proclaimed large parts of the Cape Peninsula for whites only. The Group Areas Act hit coloured families hardest. 'By 1973 some 44 885 coloured families, as compared to 27 964 Indian and 1 513 white families, had been moved into segregated residential areas in terms of the Act.' In part, we can attribute this to the isolation and vulnerability of many coloured communities and to the length of time that removals sometimes took. The chronologies in Rive's *Buckingham Palace*, *District Six* and Ngcelwane's *Sala Kahle, District Six*, which deal with the forced removal from District Six of coloured and African families respectively, suggest that up to 10 years could elapse between proposals that a

particular area be reserved for a specific 'group' and its proclamation, and then a further delay before residents were forced out.⁷³

Before the Congress of the People, SACPO had launched a bus boycott in response to the introduction of bus segregation, but with little success. According to *The Sun*, which was now essentially a UP paper, coloureds had accepted segregation long before the formal introduction of apartheid, and had adapted very quickly to train apartheid. Clearly this is incorrect, for urban areas such as District Six in Cape Town and South End in Port Elizabeth were characterised by a high degree of racial integration.⁷⁴ Nor should we view SACPO's apparent lack of attention to forced removals and segregation issues as a sign that it or coloureds accepted these policies. Preparations for the Congress of the People prevented a small organisation like SACPO from devoting sufficient resources. Following the Congress of the People, and with La Guma as one of its chief mobilisers and organisers, SACPO again instituted a boycott of segregated buses on the Cape Peninsula:

We [have] had speaker after speaker condemning the apartheid policy of the Nationalist Party... Well, we of the South African Coloured People's Organisation say now that the people must do something about it. We say that you must not be prepared to use any of the buses on the City Tramways and the Golden Arrow Services from tomorrow... We will give a lead, but you people, you use the buses, it is your task to boycott, and boycotting the buses, refusing to use the buses, is going to entail a sacrifice on your part...⁷⁵

This campaign was more successful. At the end of 1956, the Tramways Company acknowledged that the boycott had caused financial losses, though there was no change in its policies.⁷⁶

But always they have been aware of pain

February 1956 was a significant month. Blanche and Alex's first son, Eugene, was born and the Nationalist Party government passed the Separate

Representation of Voters Act. Approved by an all-white parliament, the act denied coloureds resident in the Cape Province the right to vote directly for MPs and brought them one step closer to the total disenfranchisement which had been the lot of Africans for some 20 years. Under the new legislation, coloured voters could now merely elect four white parliamentary representatives; there would be one government-nominated senator; in the Cape Province coloured voters could elect two white Provincial Councillors. In Nationalist Party thinking the loss of the vote would be offset by a Ministry of Coloured Affairs, a Coloured Affairs Department and the formation of the Union Council of Coloured Affairs, established in 1959 to advise the government on issues it thought were of specific concern to coloureds. The Coloured Representative Council followed in 1964, and in 1973 this was abolished.⁷⁷ Many of these bodies became the target of La Guma's political wit and venom as his journalism shifted from the early long pieces to the more fragmented observations of his 'Up My Alley' column. In May 1957, for instance, he criticised George Golding and the CPNU's support for Moral Rearmament: '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. What Mr Golding and his ilk need is some mental rearmament.' Two years later, commenting on preparations for celebrations to mark 50 years of the Union of South Africa, he noted that '[t]he authorities are anxious to make known the cultural and sporting progress of the Non-Europeans during the festival. Nothing is said about political and economic rights. That is enough reason for us to stay away, but no doubt Dr ID [du Plessis] will find some poor sap who will sing a liedtjie [*sic*] for the masters.'⁷⁸

According to Van der Ross, SACPO's immediate response to the Separate Representation of Voters Act was strong and clear. There would be no participation, because it 'would be quite useless except to give a show of representation where no real representation exists at all'.⁷⁹ However, SACPO's position changed significantly. In March 1956, two weeks after the act had been

passed, La Guma used his position as chair to make a number of points. The act was part of the ongoing process of segregationist and apartheid legislation:

We have always said that once the ruling class has finished with the African people they would turn to the other sections of the population, and in 1936, when the African people began to feel the oppression...we said that the coloured people and the Indian people would be next in line, and our words have come true.⁸⁰

Here La Guma has compressed a number of significant references. These include elements of the National Party's proposed legislation on 'mixed marriages'; the 1936 Representation Act and the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act which set the amount of land available to Africans at 13 per cent; the Asiatic Land Tenure Act of and the short-lived Indian Representation Act of 1946. A model for the National Party's approach to Indian and coloured political and land rights in the years to come, together the two 1936 acts removed African voters in the Cape Province from the common roll – in the other provinces they had never enjoyed any voting rights – established a national system of indirect political representation for all Africans and confirmed the restrictions to African land rights established in 1913.⁸¹ In keeping with the broader aims of the Congress Alliance, he argued that

...the only salvation of the coloured people is to fight in line with the African people in the great struggle for democracy in South Africa... There is no way out for you – your place is beside the African people who have suffered so many years for these things that are now affecting you and that's in store for you.⁸²

He was equally clear that 'the only alternative for the non-European people of South Africa is to organise the struggle for liberation outside of Parliament, not through Parliament...that's where their struggle lies'.⁸³

However, in 1936 SACPO did not exist, so La Guma's use of 'we' in 1956 indicates that in this context he has adopted another discursive and political identity. La Guma's appropriation of a collective and omniscient historical and political narrative position has several implications. In the longer term, it looks forward to the way in which his last two published novels, *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* and *Time of the Butcherbird*, would incorporate moments of past resistance and repression. Since these moments are linked to representations of the liberation struggle in national terms, La Guma's omniscient historical and political narrative position becomes the device by which he moves away from depiction of coloured life and politics in the Cape towards what Chandramohan has called 'trans-ethnicity'.⁸⁴ Without reducing his fiction to the representation of his political beliefs, we can say that at this point there were signs of the direction which his plots and representations would take. In the shorter term, it established continuity with his father's political concerns. In December 1935, the prospect of the Native Representation Act and the Native Trust and Land Act had precipitated formation of the All Africa Convention (AAC) which met again in June the following year. Among those who attended were 'Communists and Cape radicals' such as Moses Kotane and Jimmy la Guma. Despite initial hopes that the AAC would develop into a powerful united front that would ensure that its candidates were elected, Convention members were initially divided on the question of whether to boycott elections under the Act, while liberals and radicals who supported participation ended up opposing each other on the hustings.⁸⁵ SACPO would encounter similar problems.

The 1956 speech was also significant as an early indication of La Guma's sense of humour and the descriptive interests that would characterise his early fiction. Commenting on the way in which 'the Nationalists, who are descendants of the Voortrekkers...have never yet...got rid of the Voortrekker mentality', he felt confident of his ability to 'recommend the direction in which they should trek'.⁸⁶ Here La Guma has made what Freud might have called a 'hostile' or 'aggressive' joke that enabled him 'to exploit something ridiculous in [his] enemy'.⁸⁷ By repeating the word 'trek' he has indicated that those who trekked 'voor' [Afrikaans for 'ahead'] had actually gone backwards in

intellectual and political terms. As aggressive humour, it usurps the power of the oppressors and uses it against them. It also looks forward to the satirical Pampoen-onder-die-Bos sketches in his Up My Alley column. Through these, he created a mythical Afrikaner *volksstaat* to show how backward and absurd apartheid really was. La Guma's Voortrekker joke indicates that the representation of perceived national groups, whether Afrikaans or coloured, was potentially problematic. In addition, towards the end of the Parade meeting he describes '[t]his thing – this policy of apartheid and white "baasskap"' – as 'a black, dark, crawling thing...out of the putrid minds of the Nationalists'.⁸⁸ Though balanced by more positive and community-oriented descriptions of the district, these images provide a hint of the growing sense of anger and disgust which he expressed in *A Walk in the Night*, a work as memorable for its descriptions of decay as it is for its affirmation that the repressed will 'return'.⁸⁹

In this 1956 speech, La Guma assumes that he, SACPO, his audience and the government could all agree on the national or racial categories with which they could understand the liberation struggle and the imposition of apartheid. However, agreement on broad outlines did not necessarily translate into agreement about this constituency's inner dynamics. 'Identical Books', the first article to appear in *New Age* with his by-line, was an attempt to explore those inner dynamics, for it is a piece of 'ethnographic self-fashioning'.⁹⁰ It is primarily about coloureds, not immediately identified in racial or biological terms but through vignettes of customs and manners. It dispenses with the idea of history as a story of real biological and cultural origins. Instead, it uses self-deprecating irony by approaching history as a self-consciously satirical and fictional account of the origins of racial inequality. La Guma describes this as 'the honey of a satirical philosophy':

There is a story told among the 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. The people have many explanations for their lot. Some of these take the form of folk-tales, superstitions and myths; others are downright logical. However, in all there is a common consciousness that oppression, suffering and hardship are facts of life. And they have learned to temper hardship with humour, and to sweeten the bitter pill of their drab lives with the honey of a satirical philosophy. But always they have been aware of pain.⁹¹

By attributing this 'story' to 'the old people', La Guma suggests that it has an authenticity that stems from its continuity through oral transmission. The piece self-mockingly attributes 'Coloured Man's' subservient position to his foolish greed and inability to consider what God already knew but which 'Coloured Man' only discovered afterwards – the possibility that appearances can be deceptive – and that history and irony have much in common, for both seek to expose an underlying reality. Simultaneously, this 'story' rejects the distinction between inner and outer qualities by affirming that '[p]eople are like identical books with only different dustjackets. The title and the text are the same.'⁹²

Other writers such as Adam Small in his poem 'Dice' have drawn on the trope of an indifferent God who is neither omnipotent nor omniscient to explain the lot of coloureds:

die Here het geskommel
 en die dice het verkeerd geval vi' ons
 daai's maar al.
 [God gambled
 and the dice didn't fall our way
 that's about it.]⁹³

While La Guma's God knowingly creates the conditions for racial inequality and Small's leaves the outcome to fate, both present coloureds as victims of

processes beyond their control. Resistance and protest could take small forms as they 'marched through the muck of France and Belgium...sweated in Abyssinia, Egypt and Libya,...laughed at the German army and cracked jokes as the dive-bombers hurled steel death at them'.⁹⁴ Both assume that whites and coloureds were always present, that whites and coloureds were equal until God made them unequal by giving 'Coloured man' first choice or by abdicating responsibility.

The piece conforms to La Guma's own (and some of the other) thinking on coloured identity at this time. Firstly, he depicts specific aspects of coloured life in a manner compatible with the notion of a national group. He refers to *ghoemaliedjies*. These are songs 'accompanied by a guitar and a skin-covered drum or *ghoema*', 'usually sung on high days ... picnics, camping trips and particularly at new year' and are 'closely associated with the "Coon Carnival"'.⁹⁵ Secondly, when he acknowledged that '[t]he census declares that we are almost one-and-a-quarter million', he was identifying with and acknowledging his own place in that section of the South African population defined as coloured in the 1951 census.⁹⁶ Thirdly, when he wrote that '[p]eople are like identical books with only different dustjackets. The title and the text are the same', he expressed ambivalence about the status of the term 'coloured' under apartheid legislation.⁹⁷ Fourthly, this is probably the closest that La Guma ever came, in his non-fiction, to describing and defining the 'smaller problems' and 'smaller organisations' to which SACPO would refer when it considered whether and how to mobilise its constituency for the 1958 election. Simultaneously it tests the limits of his political project. If irony exposes the truth behind the mask worn by the powerful it does not necessarily mobilise people politically, for the act of unmasking as a 'weapon of the weak' also confirms that the weak are just that. For La Guma, political resistance would require other weapons and other struggles.

What this also suggests is that La Guma did not support coloured separatism, but felt that coloureds required distinct political and literary spaces. These spaces were distinct in the sense that he wrote his fiction and some of his journalism under constraints that differed from those under which he wrote political texts and made political speeches. In his first two short stories, 'A

Christmas Story' [see Fig. 3.2] and 'Etude', these constraints enabled him to explore issues and relationships not always regarded as appropriate to a political context.⁹⁸

Let life itself be your raw material

Paired with Richard Rive's 'Moon Over District Six' in the December 1956 issue of *Fighting Talk*, 'A Christmas Story' appears to be La Guma's first published story. 'Etude' followed one month later in *New Age*. Like his fourth, 'Battle for Honour', which first appeared in *Drum*, much of the action occurs in *smokkelhuise* and bars.⁹⁹ This is largely a world of male coloured working-class and lumpenproletarian characters. In 'A Christmas Story' these characters are bystanders whose naivety La Guma manipulates by using irony to invest their references to 'Joe's wife, Maria, [who] was about to have a baby any minute out in the backyard hokkie [shed]' with additional significance. At the same time, the story within the story of a brief conversion to charismatic Christianity undermines the structural irony by trivialising religious experience; it also confirms that experience by leaving the characters no more critical of religion than they were at the start of the main story.¹⁰⁰ 'Battle for Honour' shares with 'Etude' a narrator who is more literate, more literary and more cultured than the characters he describes. Here the focus is on the cuckolded husband who beats up his ex-wife's lover, for this is 'a matter of honour'.¹⁰¹

Initially 'Etude' inhabits the masculine bar-room world of 'A Christmas Story', but it dispenses with the play of ironies found in the latter. Its narrator does not 'play' with the gap between himself and Harry, his main character, but accentuates it. The narrator of 'Etude' shares La Guma's enjoyment of classical music performed at the Cape Town City Hall.¹⁰² In 'Etude', piano music continually distracts and transports Harry as he and his accomplices, Frog and Moos, plan a robbery. Moos recognises the music as "'Classical stuff. Just a helluva noise'", and would prefer "'a wakker jol anytime'":

The piano music quivered and undulated. Once a car passed and it was drowned momentarily, but emerged again, gentle as the drop of tears. It

was the Nocturne in E Flat Major by Chopin, but Harry did not know that.

Moos and Frog began talking about other things as the piano drifted into the Fantasia Impromptu. Harry was completely absorbed in the music now....The Duke's Head began to fill up steadily with the six o'clock crowd, until the music was lost....The spell was broken. He whistled softly through his teeth, trying to capture the tune, but his mind had not drunk deeply enough of the music.¹⁰³

Harry follows the sound of the music through the drab and dirty streets of what is probably District Six. Its buildings are like 'the ruins of abandoned churches' and 'a city...after a bombardment'.¹⁰⁴ In a device that repeats two aspects of his later reminiscences of his childhood – the elevation of the bearers of education and culture over the majority of the area's inhabitants and the view of District Six as a 'pit' or 'abyss' – Harry ascends a flight of stairs and enters a room that shares several features with the feminised interior of La Guma's grandmother's parlour. Feeling 'like a tramp...admitted to a parish tea', Harry surveys a space which the narrator describes as

neat, dustless, polished, the little tables cluttered with bric-a-brac, framed music-school certificates hanging with Queen Victoria, wedding groups and God Is Love along the papered walls... The whole place seemed to struggle for survival with the surrounding dilapidation, like a Siamese cat caught in a sewer.¹⁰⁵

Harry chats to the pianist, who plays several pieces and repeats the one that brought him there – Chopin's 'Nocturne'. La Guma's political point is clear when Harry tells her that he "'never had a chance to listen to this kind of stuff...High bugs go to the City Hall to hear it.'" He wiped his mouth on the back of his hand and went on...', but suddenly remembers his arrangement with Moos and Frog and leaves hurriedly and reluctantly. The robbery goes according to plan, but Moos is angered when Harry whistles the 'Nocturne'.

Later, Harry is placed in an identity parade. The old watchman cannot identify him until he whistles the tune again: 'When they took him away, Harry was still thinking about the girl who had played the piano so beautifully.'¹⁰⁶

La Guma entered 'Etude' in the second *New Age* short story competition.¹⁰⁷ It was unplaced, but received positive criticism from the judges, who felt that it showed 'remarkable literary ability: the writing flows; the description of the music (always difficult to convey in words) is never overdone'.¹⁰⁸ Like the first competition, it encouraged stories with a South African setting. However, these competitions did not confine content to the observable and strictly delineated reality of news articles. A publication like *New Age* would not have expected La Guma to behave 'as a mere reporter of bare, surface facts for a newspaper'. He was expected to 'probe beyond the surface...to search out the underlying causes' compatible with the paper's overall view of South Africa.¹⁰⁹ Advertisements for the competition encouraged prospective entrants to consider reality in broader, more aesthetic and introspective terms. 'Let life be your inspiration', it suggested:

We live in a country where drama, tragedy, pathos, humour and farce constantly rub shoulders – rich material for the writer's pen. There is no lack of incidents or characters, from the past and the present, around which to write a good story. Why not try your hand at dramatising your experiences and feelings? Let life itself be your raw material.¹¹⁰

Clearly, observable reality would not be the only source of La Guma's fiction.

If the 'real life' to which the later exiled La Guma referred in his articles on the relationship between art and politics was already an aesthetic category, then we should not see his journalism and fiction writing as discrete activities or view the former as an 'apprenticeship' for the latter.¹¹¹ Nor does this support Maughan-Brown's view that La Guma was guilty of 'aesthetic back-tracking... once he was established in exile'.¹¹² Instead, we should entertain two possible approaches. Firstly, the representation of life in art could influence his

journalism and fiction. Secondly, while La Guma's literary and political *milieux* were broadly supportive of realism and socialism, little suggests that he made a systematic attempt to write according to a particular set of aesthetic and political principles. We can assume that La Guma wrote 'Etude' before the review with which it appeared in *New Age*. On that basis, we should see the relation between his writing and his views on art as dynamic and interactive rather than deterministic. The review gave retrospective theoretical content to some of the ideas expressed in the short story, and was an early expression of his thoughts on the social function of art and its impact on the working class.

The review was of an oral performance at the Bantu Men's Social Centre in Johannesburg. This was where Peter Abrahams had first heard the recording of Paul Robeson's 'deep voice, touched with the velvet quality of organ notes'. La Guma listened to and was moved by 'one of the famous modern story-tellers – Emlyn Williams. A pink-cheeked, silver haired, genial man in an ordinary blue suit. With a voice of cymbals and sounding brass.'¹¹³ Mphahlele was also there. 'He sent us through the roof', he later wrote of Williams.¹¹⁴ In describing Williams as 'of the great bards of old', La Guma contrasts 'the age of glossy magazines and pocket novels' – found in his own fiction – with 'the art of recitation and elocution'.¹¹⁵ The judgement which La Guma makes as critic is not identical to the contrast and judgement which Moos expressed in the short story, for there is nothing inherently mass-produced about a "'wakker jol'". Instead it has more in common with the piano player's view that money is not so important. If we read the latter in conjunction with the review's observation that performances such as Williams' 'only reach a small section of society', that to 'the vast masses it is virtually unknown', and that this audience 'really appreciated that fact', it is clear that La Guma attributed emotionally and spiritually elevating qualities to 'high' art. He believed that this art should be brought to the people. Like Harry in 'Etude', the people whom La Guma associated with the Bantu Men's Social Centre 'hardly ever get a chance to enjoy the pleasures of fine art' such as Sir Lewis Casson and Dame Sybil Thorndyke 'doing scenes from *Macbeth*' or Mphahlele's recitation of Chekhov's monologue *On the Harmfulness of Tobacco*.¹¹⁶

In both short story and review the artist is a 'specialist', yet artist and audience stand in an unmediated relationship to each other and can interact directly.¹¹⁷ "People around here often come in to listen", the pianist tells Harry who in turn asks her to repeat her performance of the 'Nocturne'. In the review La Guma equates Williams with 'the bard, the minstrel, the story-teller' of precolonial and precapitalist societies who performed in 'ancient smoke-filled caves, in tent villages and the great halls of medieval barns'. The latter had 'his place', and this prompts La Guma to acknowledge 'a definite feeling of nostalgia' and to 'wonder whether efforts cannot be made to revive the ancient art of story-telling... among the African people so that the great epics of their long history can be made known to greater numbers of the people of South Africa'. By contrast the pianist's home was out of place. It 'seemed to struggle for survival with the surrounding dilapidation, like a Siamese cat caught in a sewer', and she herself would be "'leaving for England the day after tomorrow"'.¹¹⁸

The rural African past to which La Guma refers provides no explicit place for coloureds. In some of his writing on coloured identity La Guma had argued that 'they [coloureds] have not been able to develop fully any definite culture or customs and other conditions which go to constitute a fully fledged nationality'.¹¹⁹ It was the Treason Trial that brought him to Pretoria, Johannesburg, the Bantu Men's Social Centre and the point at which he could explore and reflect on his ideas about the relationship between heritage, modernity, nation and audience, for the Treason Trial charges and hearings assembled a multiracial audience which La Guma described as 'a great family of brothers and sisters; a marvellous picture of a New South Africa'.¹²⁰ In 1957, Williams' appearance before 'a large audience of Europeans and Non-Europeans in the hall of the Bantu Men's Social Centre' was a noteworthy occurrence at a time when performances before racially mixed audiences were becoming increasingly difficult.¹²¹ The racial composition of the audience at another event that he reviewed was also significant. This was a production of the musical *Rio Rita* by the Eoan Group in Cape Town. In his review, La Guma acknowledged that 'the more socially conscious members of the audience might

have been jarred now and then by the references to the Mexicans as “greasers”, but pointed out that on the whole the audience had ‘great fun’, and that the mere fact of a racially integrated audience was politically significant at that time.¹²²

La Guma’s early reviews stress the nature of the audience and its relationship to the performance, and indicate a preference for art that was authentic, uplifting and accessible. At the same time, these regenerative features, whether they occur through water in the short story or heritage in the recitation, are a consequence of performance and hence of repetition. Strictly speaking, every performance is different and inescapably bound to the others in its ‘family’ of performances. La Guma’s early thoughts on the relationship between politics and art acknowledged the links between audience and the capacity of ‘repetition’ rather than ‘creation from new’ to meet the progressive social goals to which he felt that art and literature should be directed. On this basis we are entitled to examine La Guma’s thoughts about his more narrowly political audiences and to explore his fiction for traces of other writers. These will be the subjects of later sections.

To hell with the cockroaches

We have already seen that ‘Identical Books’ is a piece of ‘ethnographic self-fashioning’. It also marks the beginning of an intermittent exploration of American popular culture. La Guma’s exploration was significant for at least four reasons. Given his hostility towards the United States during the Cold War, his exploration helps us to understand his political views at the time. It also helps us to gauge the diversity of his cultural interests. Thirdly, it provides an insight into his aesthetic. Finally, the combination of these factors helps us to understand a common ambivalence that combines political criticism of the United States with a strong interest in its culture. In ‘Identical Books’ the direct references to American popular culture are slight – Tony Curtis haircuts and American sailors in search of prostitutes – both of which reappeared in ‘A Glass of Wine’ and *A Walk in the Night* respectively.¹²³

La Guma's journalism during this period is replete with examples of references to American popular culture. Many were satirical. For example, there was 'Racketeers' in *Fighting Talk*, his piece on 'Hank Verwoerd's own genuwine Wild West Show' with 'ole Buck Botha of the ole CAD [Coloured Affairs Department]'; 'own stamping grounds called group areas. Yes, Sir. And we got the Population Registration branding irons all nicely warmed up and ready to sizzle.'¹²⁴ Other pieces were more serious:

Negro students in the Southern States of the Land of the Free have spotlighted the fact that the USA ain't so free by means of their campaign of breaking the social colour-bar.

They've marched into Blankes Alleen cafes and lunch counters and insisted on being served... In some cases they were arrested and in others they were put out of the various places they invaded.

But they laid bare the apartheid discrimination that exists in the country that boasts of being the leader of Western culture and civilisation.

Like the Coloured people of SA the Negroes of the USA are a persecuted minority. And we've got Blankes Alleen cafes and milk bars and theatres too, as well as a government that claims to lead Western civilisation in Africa.¹²⁵

By drawing this comparison La Guma made clear that he regarded United States and South African social and political arrangements as hypocritical, racist and oppressive. Cold War allies in the fight against the supposed threat of communism, their defence of international freedom depended upon policies of institutional racism and economic exploitation at home. We shall see that La Guma takes up this issue in *A Walk in the Night*.

At the same time, several of his comments on American popular culture imply a cultural and developmental hierarchy that almost undermines his defence of a coloured cultural institution. For instance, teenagers who liked Elvis Presley and Little Richard might be better off in a café feeding a jukebox

than “hanging around the streets”. This was the lesser of two evils: “They don’t get a chance to develop their tastes. All they get fed on is the movies and this stuff”. Here ‘taste’ is a function of economic conditions rather than education. La Guma appears to have assessed the Coon Carnival in the same way. He argued that it was popular because the economic conditions of its many supporters and participants prevented them from enjoying higher art forms, but he did not, for instance, explore the implications of or criticise it as a case of South African coloureds mimicking American whites who were in turn mimicking African-American ‘minstrels’. For La Guma it was clear that, like rock-n-roll, the Coon Carnival was ‘culture of a lower type’, and in both cases he attributed their popularity to ‘the economic level of the people’. The political implications of derivative or hybrid cultural practices were inescapable, however, and we shall see that he attempted to address them when political mobilisation was important.

Not only was American popular culture ‘low’, but it also distorted local culture. This seems to be the underlying assumption when he criticised a US Embassy sponsored talk, accompanied by music ‘supposed to have been jazz as played in SA’, but which ‘sounded just like jazz as it is played “back home” in the USA’. He made these criticisms despite his enjoyment of Benny Goodman and the contribution of African-American jazz to the formation of black South African urban culture. This culture contested many of apartheid’s assumptions and prescriptions for Africans in particular even if, like the Coon carnival in relation to coloureds, it reinforced others. ‘Which probably proved to the happy Americans that,’ he remarked, ‘apart from Coca Cola, they have got some foothold here.’¹²⁶

The other significant feature of La Guma’s use of American culture in ‘Identical Books’ is its indication that he could shift between speech registers to incorporate different voices and power relations without disturbing the narrative flow. After describing shebeens or *smokkelhuise* from the perspective of a participating outsider who is in full control of the conventions of standard English, he shifts to ‘Yankee ship just come in’, but the second half of the sentence returns to the conventions of standard English with ‘and the taxis ply

their trade between the docks and the bawdy houses', before returning to an American male voice who asks: "'Know a place where we can meet some gals, buster?'" At this point the narrator's voice returns in a passive and anonymous construction – '[t]here are places. A house can be pointed out' – which implies that the narrator has information that he must keep secret, thereby reinforcing his position as a man of the people yet, as we have seen, separate from them.

Much of La Guma's journalism and fiction relies for its effect on rapid switches between voices, such as American or coloured working class, and their political resonances, but he does not handle all these switches with equal adroitness. In a piece on the 'boys in Hanover Street' that followed 'The Dead-End Kids of Hanover Street' he sets up a contrast between the Hollywood image of tough and 'free' cowboys and the conflicts around attempts to desegregate education in Arkansas. La Guma allows no slippage or even the appearance that he has relinquished control of the narrative, for he manages their response with the phrase 'The general consensus turned out to be...'.¹²⁷ The political message is clear, but as a narrative device it renders the speakers less than active, independent political subjects. This undermines the political intention of the article. Written in the same style, 'Ten Days in Roeland Street Jail' indicates that La Guma could handle this technique more effectively. He reports on the experiences of a first-time remand prisoner who tells La Guma that he arranged for a home-cooked Sunday dinner to be smuggled into his communal cell:

'The basin of food was there, but crawling with cockroaches. There were really thousands of them, rustling and clicking over the food, gorging themselves. My stomach turned, and all my appetite for Sunday dinner left me.' But not so with his fellow prisoners. What? This was real rice, roast meat and vegetables. Huis kos [food from home]. To hell with the cockroaches. They brushed off the vermin and got stuck in.¹²⁸

Here he combines rapid discursive shifts, movement between English and Afrikaans, literal translations of Afrikaans idiom into English, changes between

direct speech, indirect speech, ostensibly overheard speech and an authoritative narrative voice. All these voices enable La Guma to blend the perspectives of narrator and characters so that we understand each character from his own perspective (the piece is about prison conditions for coloured men) while remaining receptive to the narrator's commentary, before finally returning to the viewpoint of an omniscient narrator.

In the two Hanover Street pieces, La Guma draws on representations of poverty, crime and the lumpenproletariat seen from an American perspective. While Jack London's works might have raised his adolescent political consciousness, here he uses a more accessible source – a popular series of Hollywood films produced between 1937 and 1958. These were set in the slums of New York and took their inspiration from the play 'Dead End'.¹²⁹ Many drew on these films to describe local conditions and to account for 'deviant' or criminal behaviour. Here La Guma was participating in a long-standing debate dating back at least to 1945 on what the *Cape Standard* had described as the 'skolly menace' of District Six.¹³⁰ In 1945 *The Guardian*, one of *New Age's* predecessors, claimed that the play 'might well be the story of slum children in any of our South African towns'. In the following year *Youth for a New South Africa*, the journal of the Young Communist League, defined a 'dead-end job or blind-alley job' as one 'which opens up little or no advancement to the person doing that job'.¹³¹ With the term 'Dead-End Kids' already common currency, the question whether the 'skolly menace' was inextricably linked to 'the exploitation and oppression of the non-European' or simply demonstrated "'the moral weakness" of the Coloured man' was well established.¹³² Not surprisingly, La Guma believed that social and political factors caused the skolly phenomenon. These included limited parental supervision and '[s]lums, disease, unemployment, lack of education, the terrible weight of the colour-bar which withholds the finer things of life'.¹³³ Yet by commenting on the Hanover Street 'Dead-End Kids' references to Humphrey Bogart, one of whose earliest appearances was in the *Dead-End Kids* series, La Guma shows (perhaps inadvertently) how his own representations of class and gender drew on American popular culture, much as the writers associated with *Drum* and

Sophiatown were doing, despite his own and *Fighting Talk's* criticisms of the magazine.¹³⁴

The annual 'Coon Carnival' was one of the few outlets for the Dead-End Kids' talents. With garish costumes, exaggerated gestures, suggestive lyrics and transgressions of conventional sexualities, the 'coons' and the 'Carnival' were also the site of debate around the inherent or socially determined qualities of coloureds. For a section of the coloured population, the coons were an example of a low common cultural denominator with which they were unwillingly associated. If all coloureds were judged on these terms, and culture and race were seen as interchangeable or closely associated, the argument might run, then fears of racial, political and gender disempowerment and dispossession might be well founded. In 1951, during FRAC's participation in the ANC's proposed civil disobedience campaign, Jack Cope had used his weekly cultural column to attack the coons, and two years before that *The Guardian* had described attempts to remove coloureds from the common voters' roll as 'proposals to emasculate the Coloured electorate' (coloured women had never been eligible for the limited qualified franchise).¹³⁵

For La Guma, though, the issue was primarily a class problem. Here his debt to progressive nineteenth-century anthropology based on historical materialism which, for Young, assumed that the 'development of man's spiritual or cultural life advanced according to the same laws of progress as his material life' is clear. La Guma argued that 'folks who are poor don't get a chance to develop...The big job is to raise the economic level of the people, with it their cultural standards will go up, and the coons will die out.' But not completely, for in the coda to his analysis he recalls 'a coon with a picture of Herr Strijdom sewed on the seat of his pants. That's one coon whose side I'm on anyway.'¹³⁶ In a small way, La Guma demonstrated that those outside the 'rational' language and practices shared by the state and its opposition deserved attention. As Stallybrass and White have observed, the 'ritual inversions' of carnival turn the political, social, sexual world on its head so that the degradation of 'everyday hierarchies, structures, rules and customs' is accompanied by a 'comic privileging of the bottom part of the body (feet,

knees, legs, buttocks, genitals, anus) over the rational and spiritual control of the head'.¹³⁷ La Guma implied that apparently disordered, oral and community-based criticisms of the state were as important as well ordered, written and rational attacks. For La Guma, correct political consciousness and what he regarded as 'culture of a lower type' are perfectly compatible at times, because the carnivalesque quality of the coons could subvert white cultural and political authority.

The Dead-End Kids were denied dignity and legitimate sources of income. Through the coons, they were associated with an ambiguous manifestation of coloured culture. Jail sentences for minor crimes turned them into 'beasts of prey roaming an unfriendly jungle'.¹³⁸ If La Guma's first article on the Dead-End Kids did not indicate whether the jungle was inside or outside jail, subsequent texts on experiences inside an apartheid prison – an environment strictly defined in racial and gender terms – were equally unspecific. In 'Law of the Jungle', La Guma described long-term coloured prisoners as men '[s]hut off for years from normal life' who became 'slavering beasts preying upon their own sex'. After release, many would 'stalk the world', suggesting again that for these Dead-End Kids there was little difference between life inside and outside prison. Another jail term would merely confirm 'the savagery of beast-men, the depravity'.¹³⁹ For La Guma, prison sentences caused corruption not correction.

In 'Ten Days in Roeland Street Jail' and 'Law of the Jungle', we can detect some of the concerns that characterised La Guma's subsequent fiction on prison life. In their references to 'Table Mountain', 'mass of brick and stone', 'Hardened old-timers... as calloused and hard as the stone which enclose them', 'stony-eyed guards' and 'stone walls' these articles prefigure many of the descriptions in *The Stone Country*, his third novel.¹⁴⁰ As I shall demonstrate later, La Guma's prison fiction explores the question of perceived sexual deviance through a series of symbolic expressions that psychoanalysis can help us to understand. In part, this analysis lends support to Jeppie's claim that for the majority of the middle-class and working-class residents of District Six 'any deviance from the [sexual] norm was perceived in the worst psychopathological terms'.¹⁴¹ Then, too, there is the relative absence of politically motivated

opposition to apartheid among 'criminal' as opposed to 'political' prisoners. He broaches this topic in 'Out of Darkness' and attempts to resolve it in *The Stone Country* – the novel with which this study of La Guma will end – by demonstrating that in prison all behaviour has political significance.

The notion of a community audience and the capacity to speak for this community were intrinsic to much of La Guma's early journalism and fiction, though sometimes his desire to make a political point suppressed the voice of the audience he relied upon and championed. He was deeply critical of, yet drawn to, American cultural influences and to the image of sly self-denigration that contributed to colonial representations of coloureds and the coons.

This chapter also shows that La Guma thought about art, writing, oral and literate societies, and cultural and political hierarchies at a relatively early stage in his literary and political career. He recognised the value of popular culture but believed in a cultural hierarchy. He assumed that upward cultural development would accompany political and economic development towards socialism. Simultaneously, to the extent that he and other members of the coloured educational and political elite acknowledged their own dependence on the norms of 'high' European culture, he could question his own beliefs and values.

La Guma drew on popular cultural forms for the form and content of his work, and to enhance moments of irony and reflection on the relationship between various media such as cinema, journalism and prose fiction. The next chapter will explore these relationships in more detail. In his journalism of the mid- to late-1950s there are strong indications of cultural stagism that accompanied the political stagism evident in the 1947 letter with which this chapter began. Outside his own use, La Guma tended to associate American popular cultural forms with 'low' or 'poor' taste, but in his view poor taste did not always translate into backward or limited political consciousness. It thus had liberatory potential. Later, when his own world had been turned upside down, he would turn to Brueghel, an artist sometimes regarded as of working-class or peasant origin and associated with carnival, for a less optimistic view of humanity and the world.¹⁴²

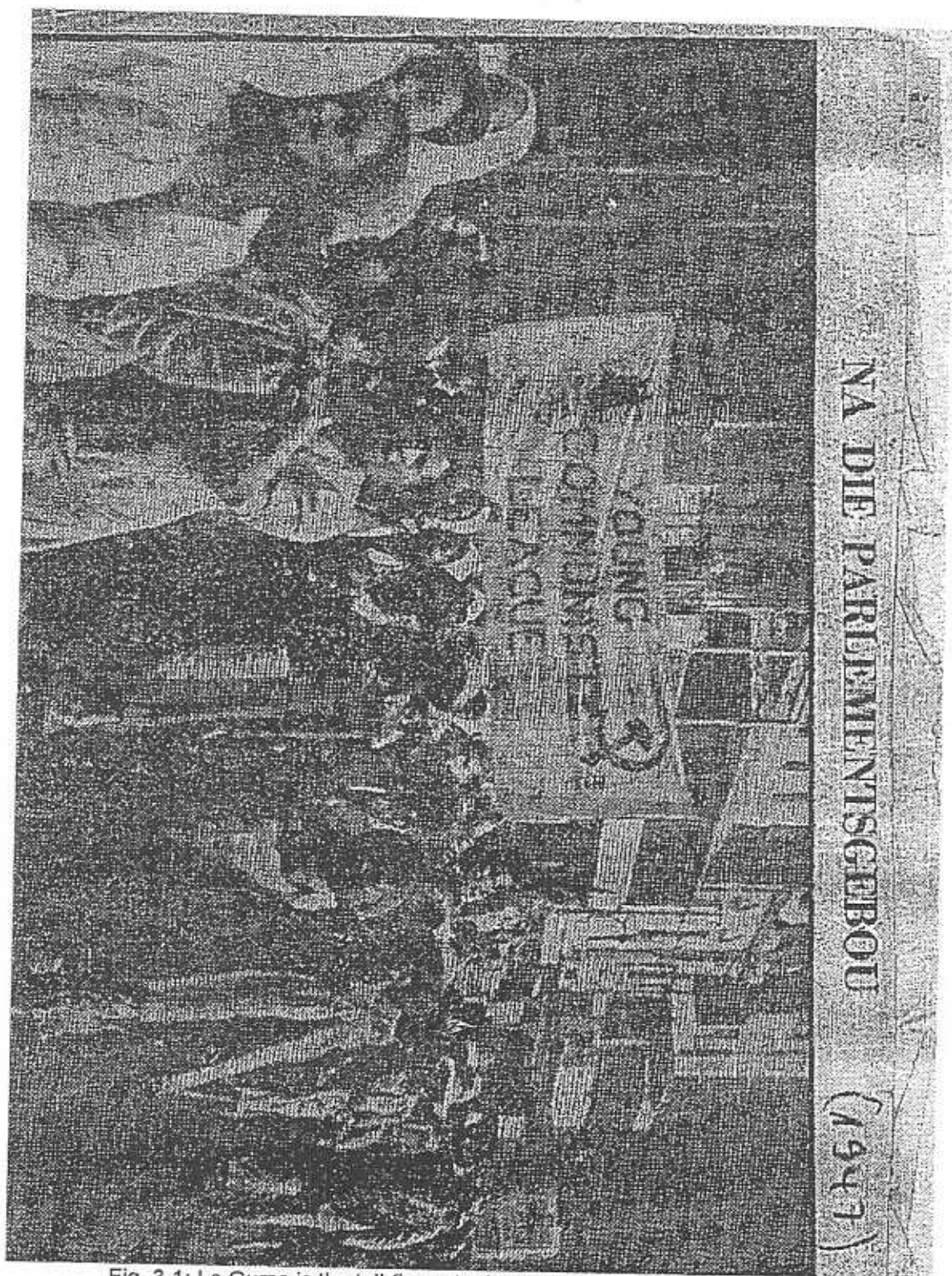


Fig. 3.1: La Guma is the tall figure to the right of the banner. Unidentified press cutting from Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection.

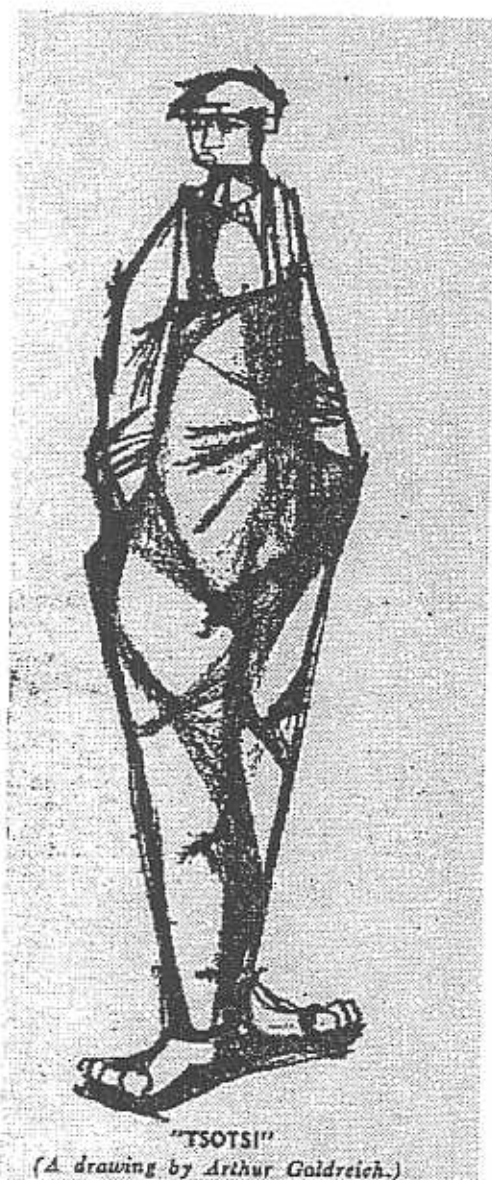


Fig. 3.2: Illustration accompanying 'A Christmas Story' (Source: *Fighting Talk* December 1956/January 1957)

Endnotes

¹ *The Sun*, 17 October 1947; *Cape Standard*, 4 November 1947; E. Berman, *Art and Artists of South Africa* (Southern Book Publishers, Cape Town, 1983), pp. 156, 97; C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. vii.

² *Advance*, 20 November 1952; *New Age*, 7 March 1957.

³ J. Coplans, *Roy Lichtenstein* (Praeger Publishers, New York, 1972); J. Coplans et al, *Andy Warhol* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1994).

⁴ Peter Clarke/Roger Field interview, 26 October 1996; Berman, *Art and Artists of South Africa*, p. 97.

⁵ G.J. Gerwel 'Van Petersen tot die hede: 'n kritiese bestekopname', in J.F. Smith, A. van Gensen and H. Willemse (eds), *Swart Afrikaanse Skrywers* (University of the Western Cape, Bellville, 1985), p. 11 (translation by R. Field); H. Willemse, 'The Black Afrikaans Writer: A Continuing Dichotomy', in D. Bunn and J. Taylor (eds), *From South Africa* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987), pp. 236-246.

⁶ See A. la Guma, 'What I learned from Maxim Gorky', *Lotus: Afro-Asian Writings* no. 34, Oct-Dec 1977, pp. 164-168; La Guma, 'The Real Picture', in C. Abrahams (ed.), *Memories of*

- Home, p. 21; B. Chandramohan, *A Study in Trans-Ethnicity in Modern South Africa: The Writings of Alex la Guma 1925-1985* (Mellon, Lewiston, 1992); R. Field, 'Fellow Travellers in an Antique Land: La Guma and Uncle Lenin', *Social Dynamics*, Vol. 20, no. 1, (Winter 1994), pp. 93-120; J. Mkhize, 'Social Realism in Alex la Guma's Longer Fiction' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Natal: 1998).
- ⁷ C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, pp. 5-6; Dr Irwin Combrinck/Roger Field interview, 5 February 1997.
- ⁸ M. Adhikari, *James La Guma*, p. 48; La Guma, *Jimmy La Guma*, p. 74.
- ⁹ ANC Veteran, 'Hamba Kahle Comrade Alex la Guma', *Sechaba*, January 1986, p. 28; B. la Guma, 'A Wife's Memory', in C. Abrahams (ed.), *Memories of Home*, p. 7.
- ¹⁰ A. Adams (A. la Guma pseud.), 'Why I Joined the Communist Party', *The African Communist* no. 47 (1971), p. 61.
- ¹¹ La Guma, 'The Picture in the Parlour', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 168.
- ¹² *The Guardian*, 17 January 1946, 23 October 1947; La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, p. 17.
- ¹³ La Guma, 'The Picture in the Parlour', p. 168.
- ¹⁴ A. la Guma, 'Non-Europeans and Communism' *Cape Standard*, 5 August 1947.
- ¹⁵ Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, pp. 241-2; C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. viii; La Guma, 'Why I Joined the Communist Party', p. 60.
- ¹⁶ Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, p. 171; *The Sun*, 23 July 1948.
- ¹⁷ Fred Carneson/Roger Field, interview 3 November 1997; *The Guardian*, 26 August 1948 and 16 September 1948.
- ¹⁸ *The Sun*, 24 September 1949; *Cape Standard*, 22 October 1940.
- ¹⁹ E. Unterhalter, *Forced Removal* (International Defence and Aid Fund, London, 1987), p. 62; T.R.H. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History* (3rd ed.) (MacMillan, Johannesburg, 1987), p. 362.
- ²⁰ A.N.C. Veteran, 'Hamba Kahle Comrade Alex la Guma', p. 28.
- ²¹ *The Guardian*, 5 May 1949.
- ²² *The Guardian*, 17 July, 1947; M. Kotane, 'Boycott of Elections under the "Representation of Natives Act"', in A. Drew (ed.), *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A documentary history* Vol. 2: 1934-1964 (Buchu Books, Cape Town, 1997), pp. 173-175.
- ²³ Dr Irwin Combrinck/Roger Field interview, 5 March 1997; B. la Guma, 'A Wife's Memory', in C. Abrahams (ed.), *Memories of Home*, p. 7. The bulk of the information on the relationship between Blanche and Alex la Guma comes from two interviews that conducted on 17 April and 15 May 1998, listed hereafter as 'interviews'.
- ²⁴ Blanche la Guma/Roger Field interviews; B. la Guma, 'A Wife's Memory', in C. Abrahams (ed.), *Memories of Home*, p. 8.
- ²⁵ Blanche la Guma/Roger Field interviews.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ M. Adhikari, *James La Guma*, pp. 14-16; C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. 7.
- ³⁰ Blanche la Guma/Roger Field interviews.
- ³¹ Blanche la Guma/Roger Field interviews.
- ³² *The Guardian*, 14 September 1950.
- ³³ ANC Veteran, 'Hamba Kahle Comrade Alex la Guma', p. 28.
- ³⁴ Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, p. 267.
- ³⁵ I. Goldin, *Making Race: The Politics and Economics of Coloured Identity in South Africa* (Maskew Miller Longman, Cape Town, 1987), p. 111.
- ³⁶ Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, p. 268.
- ³⁷ P. Abrahams, *Return to Goli* (Faber and Faber, London, 1953), p. 79.
- ³⁸ R.E. van der Ross, *The Rise and Decline of Apartheid* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 1968), p. 278.
- ³⁹ *The Sun*, 4 and 11 July 1947; Lewis *Between the Wire and the Wall*, p. 269; T. Karis and G.M. Carter (eds), *From Protest to Challenge* Vol. III Challenge and Violence (Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1977), pp. 12, 19-20.
- ⁴⁰ Karis and Carter, *From Protest to Challenge* Vol. III, pp. 19, 126.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 145-6.

- ⁴² Goldin, *Making Race*, p. 94.
- ⁴³ *New Age*, 19 May 1955.
- ⁴⁴ *South African Political Materials* (South African Research Archives Project, Bloomington, 1977), 2:DS2:81/1.
- ⁴⁵ Speech by La Guma at Congress of Democrats public meeting on Grand Parade, Cape Town, on 8 June 1955, in *Regina vs Adams and Others* (Government Printers, Pretoria, 1958), p. 107.
- ⁴⁶ *New Age*, 16 June 1955.
- ⁴⁷ *New Age*, 16 and 23 June 1955; *New Age*, 7 July 1955; Alf Wannenburg/Roger Field interview, 22 May 1998.
- ⁴⁸ T. Lodge, *Black politics in South Africa since 1945* (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1983), p. 71; Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History* pp. 387-388.
- ⁴⁹ Quoted in B. Bunting's introduction to E. Roux, *S.P. Bunting: A Political Biography* (Mayibuye Press, Bellville, 1993), p. 7.
- ⁵⁰ J. la Guma, 'Plain Politics for the Oppressed Peoples', in *The Sun*, 17 April 1936.
- ⁵¹ M. Harmel, 'Observations on Certain Aspects of Imperialism in South Africa', in A. Drew (ed.), *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History* Vol. 2: 1943-1964, p. 263.
- ⁵² *The Cape Standard*, 8 February 1938.
- ⁵³ W. Sisulu, 'Freedom of Nations', in R. First (ed.), *South Africans in the Soviet Union* (Pacific Press, Johannesburg, 1955), p. 8; my thanks to Don Pinnock for telling me about this pamphlet.
- ⁵⁴ K.A. Jordaan, 'What are the National Groups in South Africa?', in A. Drew (ed.), *South Africa's Radical Tradition* Vol. 2, p. 271; I. Goldin, 'The reconstitution of Coloured identity in the Western Cape', in S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa* (Longman, London, 1987), p. 168.
- ⁵⁵ K.A. Jordaan, 'What are the National Groups in South Africa?', p. 271; J. Stalin, *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1936), p. 8; H.J. Simons, 'Nationalisms in South Africa', in A. Drew (ed.), Vol. 2, p. 277; Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, p. 262.
- ⁵⁶ K. Kettering, 'Domesticating Uzbeks: Central Asians in Soviet decorative art of the twenties and thirties', in T. Barringer and T. Flynn (eds), *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum* (Routledge, London, 1998), pp. 95-110.
- ⁵⁷ A. Lipman, 'What is wrong with local art?', *Fighting Talk* September 1954, p. 14.
- ⁵⁸ K.A. Jordaan, 'What are the National Groups in South Africa?', in A. Drew (ed.), p. 272; H.C. Bosman, 'Funeral Earth' and 'Unto Dust', in *Fighting Talk* June/July and August 1958.
- ⁵⁹ Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, p. 171; E. Unterhalter, *Forced Removal*, pp. 67-72.
- ⁶⁰ A. la Guma, 'The Machine', in *Fighting Talk* October 1956, pp. 8-9; *New Age*, 28 November 1957, 12 December 1957.
- ⁶¹ *South African Political Materials*, (South African Research Archives Project, Bloomington, 1977) 2:DS2/1:30:4; SACPO: First Annual National Conference, 20-21 April 1957.
- ⁶² *New Age*, 13 August 1959, *New Age*, 31 December 1959.
- ⁶³ *New Age*, 16 June 1955.
- ⁶⁴ *South African Political Materials*, 2:DS2/1:30/2, 2:DS2:41/3; Lodge, *Black politics in South Africa since 1945*, p. 40.
- ⁶⁵ Lodge, *Black politics in South Africa since 1945*, p. 72.
- ⁶⁶ *New Age*, 19 May, 1955; *South African Political Materials*, 2:DS2:11/2; La Guma, 'Identical Books', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 3-5.
- ⁶⁷ *Regina vs Adams and Others*, pp. 142-3.
- ⁶⁸ 'Minutes of a SACPO Executive Committee Meeting in Salt River on 14 June, 1955', *South African Political Materials*, 2:DS/2/1/30/1.
- ⁶⁹ C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. 10.
- ⁷⁰ Blanche la Guma/Roger Field interviews.
- ⁷¹ *New Age*, 23 June 1955; C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, pp. viii, 10; R. Field, 'Kaaps, Colouredism and Comics: Alex la Guma's early writings', *Pretexts* Vol. 7, No. 1, 1998, p. 63.
- ⁷² *New Age*, 1 October 1959.
- ⁷³ Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, pp. 269, 265; R. Rive, 'Buckingham Palace', *District Six* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1991), pp. 72, 126; N. Ngcelwane, *Sala Kahle, District Six* (Kwela

- Books, Cape Town, 1998); A.J. Christopher, *The Atlas of Apartheid* (Routledge, London, 1994), p. 106.
- ⁷⁴ *The Sun*, 3 September 1948; Christopher, *The Atlas of Apartheid*, pp. 103-125.
- ⁷⁵ *Regina vs Adams and Others*, p. 155.
- ⁷⁶ Goldin, *Making Race*, p. 113; *New Age*, 29 November 1956.
- ⁷⁷ Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, p. 269; Christopher, *The Atlas of Apartheid*, p. 64.
- ⁷⁸ La Guma, 'Big Chief Buttonhole', 'Liedtjie for the Masters', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 134, 115 [original spelling].
- ⁷⁹ Van der Ross, *The Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, p. 264.
- ⁸⁰ *South African Political Materials*, 2: DS2: 81
- ⁸¹ M. Ballinger, *From Union to Apartheid: A Trek to Isolation* (Juta, Cape Town, 1969), p. 131; Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History*, p. 570.
- ⁸² Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, pp. 150, 175, 178.
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁴ *South African Political Materials*, 2: DS2: 81.
- ⁸⁵ A. la Guma, *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* (Heinemann, London, 1979), *Time of the Butcherbird* (Heinemann, London, 1979); B. Chandramohan, *A Study in Trans-Ethnicity in Modern South Africa*.
- ⁸⁶ J. and R. Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950* (International Defence and Aid Fund, London, 1983), pp.493, 497; *Cape Standard*, 24 January 1937.
- ⁸⁷ *South African Political Materials*, 'Vergadering: South African Coloured People's Organisation, Parade, Kaapstad, 13/3/56', 2: DS2: 81; *New Age*, 8 September 1960.
- ⁸⁸ S. Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (Hogarth Press, London, 1981), p.103.
- ⁸⁹ G. Cornwell, 'And a Threefold Cord: La Guma's Neglected Masterpiece?', paper presented at La Guma colloquium, University of the Western Cape, December 1995; J.M. Coetzee 'Into the Dark Chamber: The Writer and the South African State', in J.M. Coetzee, *Doubling the Point* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass., 1992); W. Carpenter "'Ovals, Spheres, Ellipses and Sundry Bulges": Alex la Guma Imagines the Human Body,' *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 22, No.4 (1991).
- ⁹⁰ See 'Etude', *New Age*, 24 January 1957; *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 34-35, 95; R. Rive, 'Buckingham Palace'—*District Six*, pp. 72, 106.
- ⁹¹ Z. Wicomb, 'Postcoloniality and Postmodernity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa', in *AUETSA '96 Conference Proceedings* (University of the Western Cape, Bellville: 1997), p. 5.
- ⁹² La Guma, 'Identical Books', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 3-5.
- ⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- ⁹⁴ Cited in Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, p. 245; Lewis uses this poem as an epigraph for his chapter on the 1948 elections and the apartheid era.
- ⁹⁵ La Guma, 'Identical Books', p. 3.
- ⁹⁶ C. Winburg, 'The "Ghoemaliedjies" of the Cape Muslims: Remnants of a slave culture', p.3; later published as 'Satire, Slavery and the "Ghoemaliedjies" of the Cape Muslims', *New Contrast* Vol. 19, no. 4, 1991.
- ⁹⁷ La Guma, 'Identical Books', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 5; *Union Statistics for Fifty Years* (Bureau of Census and Statistics, Pretoria, 1960), p. A-4; Goldin, 'The reconstitution of Coloured identity in the Western Cape', p. 171.
- ⁹⁸ La Guma, 'Identical Books', p.5.
- ⁹⁹ A. la Guma, 'A Christmas Story', in *Fighting Talk* December 1956/January 1957 p. 6; 'Etude'.
- ¹⁰⁰ La Guma, 'A Christmas Story'; 'Etude'; 'Out of Darkness', in R. Rive (ed.), *Quartet: Four Voices from South Africa* (Heinemann, Oxford, 1982), pp. 33-38; Blanche la Guma/Roger Field interview 17 April 1998.
- ¹⁰¹ La Guma, 'A Christmas Story', p. 6.
- ¹⁰² A. la Guma, 'Battle for Honour', in *Drum*, November 1958 pp.85-86.
- ¹⁰³ A. la Guma quoted in C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. 25.
- ¹⁰⁴ La Guma, 'Etude'.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁸ *New Age*, 4 October 1956.

- ¹⁰⁹ *New Age*, 24 January 1957.
- ¹¹⁰ *New Age*, 12 May 1955, C. Abrahams, p. 48.
- ¹¹¹ *New Age*, 2 June 1955.
- ¹¹² A. la Guma, 'Alexander Solzhenitsyn: "Life through a crooked eye"' *The African Communist* no. 56, 1974 p. 71; J. Mkhize, 'Alex la Guma's Politics and Aesthetics' *Alternation* 5, 1 (1998), p. 160.
- ¹¹³ D. Maughan-Brown, 'Adjusting the Focal Length: Alex la Guma and Exile', *English in Africa* Vol. 18 No. 2, p. 34.
- ¹¹⁴ P. Abrahams, *Tell Freedom* (Faber and Faber, London, 1954), p. 191; La Guma, 'Non-European Audience Hears Emlyn Williams', *New Age*, 24 January 1957.
- ¹¹⁵ E. Mphahlele, *Down Second Avenue* (London, Faber and Faber: 1975), p. 215.
- ¹¹⁶ La Guma, 'Non-European Audience...'.
¹¹⁷ Ibid. [original punctuation]; Mphahlele, *Down Second Avenue*, p. 216.
- ¹¹⁸ La Guma, 'Etude', 'Non-European Audience...'.
¹¹⁹ La Guma, 'Etude', 'Non-European Audience...'.
¹²⁰ *South African Political Materials*, 2:DS2/1:92/15.
- ¹²¹ La Guma, in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 33.
- ¹²² La Guma, 'Non-European Audience...'.
¹²³ *New Age*, 13 September 1959.
- ¹²⁴ La Guma, 'Identical Books', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 4; A. la Guma, 'A Glass of Wine' (1960), in R. Rive (ed.), *Quartet*, p. 91; La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 49-57.
- ¹²⁵ A. la Guma, 'Racketeers', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 207-209; A. la Guma, 'Wild West Show', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 209-210.
- ¹²⁶ La Guma, 'Uncle Sam', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 171.
- ¹²⁷ La Guma, in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 111, 114, 113. This section also draws on R. Field, 'Kaaps, Colouredism and Comics...', p. 70.
- ¹²⁸ La Guma, 'The Dead-End Kids of Hanover Street', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 9-10; 'Uncle Sam', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 170.
- ¹²⁹ La Guma, 'Ten Days in Roeland Street Jail', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 16.
- ¹³⁰ J. Walker (ed.), *Haliwell's Film Guide*, (Harper Collins, London, 1991), pp. 143, 276.
¹³¹ *Cape Standard*, 1 October 1940, 18 September 1945.
- ¹³² *The Guardian*, 29 November 1945; *Youth for a New South Africa*, August 1946, p. 23.
- ¹³³ *Cape Standard*, 1 October 1940, 18 September 1945; *Youth for a New South Africa*, August 1946, p. 23.
- ¹³⁴ La Guma, 'The Dead-End Kids of Hanover Street', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 9-10.
- ¹³⁵ *The Guardian*, 29 November 1945; La Guma, 'The Real Picture', in C. Abrahams (ed.), *Imagining Home*, p. 19; *Fighting Talk* June 1955.
- ¹³⁶ *The Guardian*, 2 August 1951, 8 December 1949.
- ¹³⁷ R.J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (Routledge, London, 1996), pp. 45, 49; *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 113-114.
- ¹³⁸ P. Stallybrass and A. White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Methuen, London, 1986), p. 183.
- ¹³⁹ *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 9-10.
- ¹⁴⁰ *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 19.
- ¹⁴¹ *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 14-19; G. Cornwell, 'Protest in Fiction: an approach to Alex la Guma' (Rhodes University, M.A. thesis, 1979), p. 100.
- ¹⁴² S. M. Jeppie, 'Aspects of Popular Culture and Class Expression in Inner-Cape Town; circa 1935-1959' (University of Cape Town, M.A. dissertation, 1990), p. 63.
- ¹⁴³ F. Grossman, *Pieter Bruegel: Complete Edition of the Paintings* (Phaidon, London, 1973), p. 48-49.

Chapter Four

This is the time for practical politics

This chapter examines La Guma's journalism, drawings and comics between 1955 and 1961 in the context of his role in the 1958 elections, and his developing ideas on the political aspects of coloured identity. The two-year overlap with the previous chapter draws attention to two points. Firstly, there were no 'epistemological breaks' or shifts from one discrete stage of thought or writing to the next in his work. Instead there was a series of transitions in which a variety of discourses and positions could exist simultaneously. Secondly, despite La Guma's increased literary productivity this was a no less political period. Greater state repression, stronger and more determined resistance from the Congress Alliance, including the South African Coloured Peoples Organisation (SACPO) and its successor the Coloured Peoples Congress (CPC), provided the conditions for new forms of expression and experimentation in genre, language and style.

La Guma's explicit comparison in 1960 between South Africa and the USA demonstrated his view that racism and capitalism were inextricably linked but provided no clue as to how they could be overcome. For that we must turn back three years. By 1957, one year after the Grand Parade speech in which he had ruled out participation in apartheid political structures, SACPO's position had changed. On the one hand, its new position seemed to suggest that the route of the American civil rights movement in which African-Americans 'insisted on being served' was a viable strategic option.¹ In the increasingly repressive climate of the Treason Trial this option could be translated into electoral participation, for the political activities of defendants were restricted, there were mass arrests and a state of emergency was declared in 1960. Simultaneously, SACPO's position carried the AAC's legacy of ambivalence, uncertainty and militancy as it assessed possible responses to the 1958 elections:

Considering the representation of the House of Assembly and the Provincial Council, we find that there are two courses open to the Coloured electorate.

They can decide to boycott all elections to these institutions, or they can carry the fight into the ranks of the enemy by putting up progressive candidates for elections.

Either alternative can be used as a tactical weapon against the government and in the interest of the liberatory movement. Under certain conditions it is necessary to adopt either one or the other tactic.

At this stage it is not possible to predict what situations and conditions will arise or what the political mood of the people will be when the time of the elections are on hand. These things must be examined before taking any decision.²

Part of the reason for SACPO's uncertainty at this stage was the realisation that the broad, shared goal of liberation could only be achieved if specific second-order problems were solved, for

...the general situation existing in South Africa consists of particular situations. The task of bringing about the changes which the people desire...requires also the solution of many comparatively smaller problems.³

This in turn enabled SACPO to define its constituency and to acknowledge its particular problems and the specificity of a national group – whatever the source of that specificity might be at this stage – but without discarding its commitment to an analysis based on economic exploitation and national oppression:

The Coloured community has within itself large numbers of smaller organisations, social, cultural, sporting and religious. There are trade unions and other bodies. We must be prepared to seek their co-operation

on all issues of common interest on a straightforward and honest basis and endeavour to recruit from their ranks...⁴

There were several other possible reasons for SACPO's change on the election issue, none without problems.

Firstly, the Treason Trial had forced the Congress Alliance to explore all possible political options. While the Alliance supported the idea of a united front to get rid of the National Party, it had to distinguish its own front from its problematic predecessor of the early 1950s. Made up of the War Veterans' Torch Commando, the Labour Party and the United Party, that front had also opposed the National Party's attempts to disenfranchise coloureds. Constrained by a conservatism with which it defended an already racially exclusive constitution, a paternalism which saw it argue that 'a failure of the white man to keep his word to a non-European [would] undermine race relations in South Africa' and an adherence to segregation policies as a result of which it excluded coloured members while it fought for their rights, this front had disintegrated following the National Party's success in the 1953 election.⁵

A historically constituted group or community

We have already seen that in December 1955 La Guma had spoken about the front he envisaged at a meeting on the Grand Parade. In that speech he had declared SACPO's and the Congress Alliance's demand for a new constitution that would make South Africa a 'decent country for the people to live in'. He had also rejected co-operation with the United Party and Liberal Party.⁶ Six months later in Durban, where he spoke at the annual general meeting of the Natal Indian Congress, he called for 'a mighty people's front against the nationalists'.⁷

Secondly, the new approach implied that SACPO was exploring the links between various political strategies, political alliances and different ideas about coloured identity. The boycott position was simple and clear, and if SACPO adhered to it there was the possibility of a 'left alliance' limited by the Unity Movement's

'principles' and the latter's rejection of a specifically coloured identity. However, this would merely unite those who refused to vote and/or who had not registered, and therefore would not elect anyone to parliament. Alternatively, among the more conservative enfranchised coloured voters coloured identity was less problematic but tied to the United Party's paternalism and segregation policies. If SACPO wished to reach and win over this group it would have to acknowledge a conservative and submissive notion of coloured identity in some way while drawing those who operated within it towards the discourses and practices of the national liberation struggle led by the ANC. This would not be easy.

Less than a year later, in a leaflet titled 'SACPO and the Elections' issued from 1 Roger Street in District Six, Jimmy and Alex la Guma's former home that now served as the offices of the Cape Peninsula Election Council, SACPO argued that '[to] boycott the elections means playing into the hands of the Nationalists and the white supremacists. Do you want a Nationalist who believes in apartheid to speak for you in Parliament? Do you want a United Party member who believes in white supremacy to represent you?', it asked.⁸

How and why did SACPO's position change in such a short period? If we wish to understand these transitions and La Guma's contribution to an unsuccessful effort to shift coloured voters from the initial boycott position articulated by Van der Ross in the early 1950s, through a period of uncertainty, to a position that supported indirect representation by Congress Alliance oriented candidates in 1957, we need to examine debates around the political use of the boycott and how this contributed to La Guma's representations of coloured identity at the time. We have already seen that the AAC did not adopt a uniform response to the 1936 legislation; that in 1947 the CPSA called for a boycott of elections under the Representation of Natives Act; that during 1947 and 1949 in the Cape the CPSA and allied organisations had rejected calls for a coloured boycott of the 1948 elections and had approved steps to defend existing coloured and African franchise rights; that in 1948 its national conference decided to 'work for the election of a bloc of candidates pledged to repeal the Act, the introduction of a universal franchise and the recognition of the

right of all Africans to sit in Parliament'. Among its candidates in the following years were Sam Kahn, Brian Bunting and Ray Alexander, all of whom were denied the chance to represent their constituencies by a succession of anticommunist laws.⁹

Speaking about FRAC in 1951, Fred Carneson cited the success of opposition to the imposition of passes on African women as a reason for resisting the government's attempts to deny coloured people in the Cape the franchise. For Carneson at that time, 'narrow and limited as it was', 'the Coloured vote [was] symbolic of much more than a limited franchise – it symbolised a certain citizen-status'. However, defence of a limited franchise right did not at this stage imply support for candidates claiming to represent coloured voters. 'If the present campaign is successful,' Carneson predicted, 'it will be very difficult for anyone to stand as candidates for the special Coloured representatives.'¹⁰ Once the idea of a boycott took hold it would be very hard to reverse. It was presumably with thoughts along these lines that SACPO's April 1957 national conference, the one at which La Guma was elected General Secretary, resolved to boycott all elections under the Separate Representation of Voters Act.

However while SACPO was developing a boycott position, the Congress Alliance as a whole appeared to be exploring the possibility of an extra-parliamentary United Front dedicated to removing the National Party from power.¹¹ Consequently, in February 1957 Walter Sisulu made a twofold distinction. He distinguished between 'boycott of the institutions' of apartheid and 'rejection of differential political institutions' such as the Native Representation and Separate Representation of Voters acts and between the political boycott as a principle and as a tactic. From this it followed that '[o]nce we differentiate between the principle and the tactic... then the fight against such institutions can include participation in them with a view to rendering impotent the system that gives rise to them'.¹²

During one of the many breaks in Treason Trial proceedings that enabled him to return to Cape Town, La Guma entered the debate through a series of articles for *New Age*. In these he canvassed prominent figures on two questions: 'Should the Coloured people be concerned with the outcome of the general election in which

only European voters will participate?'; 'What should be the attitude of the Coloured people to the election of four European M.P.s to represent them?'.¹³ La Guma's approach did not display consistency or willingness to accommodate the varying shades of political opinion that a united front might contain. SACPO's first chairperson, Edgar Deane, was among the few who supported participation through progressive candidates, but La Guma's attack on him the following month because he supported the proposal for a new Federation of Non-European Trade Unions could not have helped SACPO's election prospects.¹⁴ Though the majority of those approached, including Richard van der Ross, Cissie Gool, Edgar Maurice and an 'anonymous Coloured principal' supported a boycott, *New Age* published an anonymous letter (written by La Guma?) that favoured participation:

Why not put Congress candidates in the field to take the message of the Freedom Charter to Parliament?... There is no time to kill ourselves with big theoretical questions. This is the time for practical politics... We will see who will win... we or theory; the Congresses or the Nats and the UP.¹⁵

There can be little doubt that the letter's criticisms of 'theory' and the consequences of concern with 'big theoretical questions' were a coded reference to the NEUM. From La Guma's perspective, NEUM members rejected any participation in organisations associated with apartheid and therefore were not interested in 'practical' politics. In addition they rejected the notion of coloured identity as an apartheid construct and prided themselves on their theoretical correctness. Without spelling it out, *New Age* readers would have known that SACPO faced not two but three opponents in this election – the NEUM, the NP and the UP.

Subsequent reports in *New Age* referred to Albert Luthuli's statement at the 1957 ANC conference in which he questioned 'our idea of indifference to a White general election', and later the paper reported that SACPO proposed an 'extra parliamentary United Front of all forces opposed to... apartheid'.¹⁶ Perhaps ultimately the opinions canvassed or the significance of opposition to participation in

the elections did not matter. In the concluding article of this series La Guma acknowledged that SACPO members had confirmed their support for an election boycott, but with an air which suggested that the decision to participate was already a *fait accompli* he pointed out that the SACPO position was 'up for revision' at its forthcoming national conference. By the following week, the business of its second national conference concluded, SACPO policy was 'in line with that of the other Congresses'.¹⁷ Ironically, after its first national conference had acknowledged that the 'Coloured community [had] within itself a larger number of smaller organisations' and had opposed 'a policy of sectarianism', SACPO then evolved a position that required a united coloured response *and* which proved divisive.¹⁸

When SACPO decided to participate in the 1958 elections by 'carrying the fight to the enemy', the organisation stressed that it would include 'treason suspects amongst its candidates as a challenge to the Nationalists'.¹⁹ It might have justifiably argued that the example of Ben Turok, unopposed African representative in the Cape Provincial Council in May 1957, was confirmation that in the Cape black South Africans could elect progressive white representatives under the system of indirect representation. For the Cape Peninsula region SACPO nominated COD president Piet Beyleveld as its Coloured Representative. Expressing views similar to those in the anonymous letter, SACPO declared that '[t]he nomination of Mr Beyleveld and his return to Parliament' would 'be of nation-wide significance':

It will be a dynamic challenge to white baasskap and the brutal oppression of the Nationalist Government. It is a positive rejection of the idea that the Coloured people seek their future in the bankruptcy of the United Party, and... a militant and progressive action in opposition to the sterile theorising of the Unity Movement and its boycott allies... Our candidate completely rejects the type of representation which denies the franchise to the bulk of the people. He will fight for the right of black people to sit in the House of Assembly. He will be the voice of Congress in Parliament.²⁰

Beyleveld's subsequent behaviour did not negate the reasoning behind the idea of white candidates but, as we shall see in Chapter Seven, it did show how misplaced SACPO's faith in him would be.

Participation in the elections simultaneously committed the organisation to mobilising coloureds as a specific national group, and this led to conflicts between SACPO and its opponents and within the organisation itself. For Gomas, participation within the terms of the Separate Representation of Voters Act would 'only mean setting in motion a process of *further debasement*. Nowhere else in the world are there people called upon to besmirch themselves as our "friends and Comrades" are doing to us.'²¹ In January 1958, six members of SACPO's Transvaal Committee resigned in protest at the decision to contest the elections. Jimmy la Guma, who was then SACPO national president while several younger figures were caught up in the Treason Trial, condemned their actions as 'negative, short sighted and politically unscientific at this stage'.²²

With an uncertain start and limited resources, SACPO only appears to have appealed for volunteers in March 1958. They were asked to report to 1 Roger Street in District Six and Helderweg 8 in Athlone. This was next door to Alex and Blanche's house. Their neighbours were his sister Joan, her husband and Jimmy and Wilhelmina la Guma. Alex and Blanche also flew a large Congress Alliance flag over their house at the start of the election campaign, but the police tore it down.²³ In addition, as a Treason Trialist, SACPO's candidate faced political restrictions. Beyleveld could not make a public speech without first showing his text to the security police 24 hours in advance. He addressed his first election audience in March – less than one month before the election. Beyleveld and Vogel, the Outeniqua constituency candidate, lost their deposits. In the Cape Peninsula Abe Bloomberg, the UP candidate with a 'big fleet of flashy cars' at his disposal, won.²⁴

In part the campaign may have been 'a cheeky way of getting back at the government rather than a concession to white politics', but La Guma took the post mortem analysis seriously.²⁵ He ascribed low voter turn-out to the fact that election day was pay-day and that it coincided with a Muslim fast. At issue with the Unity

Movement to the last, he tried to play downplay the effect of the boycott by claiming that its effect had been 'negligible'. Simultaneously, the NEUM was worse than the opposition candidate was, because Bloomberg and Beyleveld 'had a common enemy in the boycotters'.²⁶ La Guma also criticised the 'theoretical' immiseration argument that the National Party's re-election would exacerbate social contradictions and raise popular political consciousness. Oppression, he predicted,

...can also become so powerful that it becomes pretty difficult to resist. And people can become so demoralised under the weight of the load that it takes years for them to get round to raising a finger to throw it off. I've heard some saying, 'The people will be forced to organise.' But if they weren't enthusiastic about it when they were given the chance to, they might find it hard to shake a leg under increased difficulties.²⁷

The extremely poor response to Beyleveld indicates that the majority of enfranchised coloureds who voted had little time for the Congress Alliance. Here La Guma, along with other figures in the Congress Alliance, appear to have confused large-scale attendance at SACPO election meetings with potential support at the polls.²⁸ Several factors had contributed to a decrease in the coloured electorate. In 1940 the UP had passed the Electoral Laws Amendment Act which made only white registration compulsory, while the National Party had challenged the presence on the roll of many individual coloured voters, and there had been a strong boycott tradition since 1943 when the Coloured Advisory Council was formed.²⁹ Writing with an unusual degree of understatement, La Guma noted 'that the Coloured people 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'.³⁰ This was an issue to which he and SACPO returned on several occasions with similar phrases – indicating that there was little else he or SACPO could suggest by way of improvement. La Guma and SACPO had failed in their objective

to reach this dwindling electorate. Later he and SACPO would have more success – but not in the electoral sphere.

Political recriminations continued after the elections.³¹ In May 1958 *New Age* reported that George Peake had been suspended from the SACPO National Council ‘for identifying himself with the boycott against the recent elections’. For La Guma the issue went beyond that. In an manuscript that does not appear to have been published, he made it clear that if support for SACPO’s election position involved commitment to a particular notion of coloured identity, then rejection of its election policy involved rejection of that identity, of the two-stage theory, and of the Congress Alliance. His strikingly aggressive analysis initially frames coloured identity through racial categories that define coloureds in terms of a lack of definition, an ‘intermixture’, before presenting what he regards as its contradictory social and political aspects:

The Coloured people are a historically constituted group or community which evolved over the past two hundred odd years of the intermixture of white people with Hottentots, Javanese, Malay and African slaves.

Because of their short history and because of the fact that they evolved within a society based upon the oppression of national groups they have not been able to develop fully any definite culture or customs and other conditions which go to constitute a fully fledged nationality. However, during their brief span of evolution they have acquired certain characteristics, small and ill-defined as they might be, compensated by the particular form of economic and political oppression to which they have been subjected, all which have made it possible for them to be identified as a particular group within South African society – namely as the coloured people.³²

La Guma’s response has much in common with the contributions of Jordaan and Simons to the 1954 symposium on the national question. He does not question the

existence of 'national groups', but objects to their oppression, for it is oppression that prevents the acquisition of characteristics associated with a 'fully fledged nationality'. However, if segregation and apartheid have prevented coloureds from becoming a 'fully fledged nationality', they have simultaneously made up (La Guma uses the word 'compensated') for this lack by providing 'characteristics, small and ill-defined'. La Guma does not say that these characteristics gave coloureds the opportunity to see themselves or to formulate their own identity. Rather they facilitate identification by others who remain unspecified. By suggesting that the source of coloured national group identity lies outside the group and that therefore it has little control over its identity, La Guma has rejected notions of an essential coloured identity but given its bearers little control over it. He does not gloss over the oppressor's role in the creation of a coloured identity with which coloureds themselves identify in part. Faced with this conundrum, La Guma's argument implies that the struggle for freedom as a national group is the starting point for true national group identity. On the basis of this manuscript, La Guma appears to argue that segregation and apartheid provide an imperfect and oppressive point of origin for coloured identity, and that the struggle for freedom as a national group will provide a more satisfactory basis for that identity. Significantly he has left open the question whether with national liberation and socialism that identity will acquire a 'true' or 'correct' form beyond which no further development is necessary.

There is no indication that in the context of this debate La Guma equated hybridity with degeneracy or impurity. Coloureds were a recognisable group and there was nothing problematic or negative in their origins or continued existence as an 'intermixture'. Rather, as the following passage from the manuscript suggests, the two-stage revolutionary theory implied here supports a progressivist or 'stagist' approach in which societies inevitably evolve from primitive to higher stages, in the process of which 'the Coloured people' were struggling for freedom from national oppression and for equality with other groups:

In the general struggle of the non-European peoples of S.A. for liberation from national oppression, the Coloured people have emerged as an identifiable group struggling for its own emancipation and for the right to exist in S. African society on an equal basis with all other groups...Mr Peake among other things speaks of the (1) "we the so-called Coloured people"; goes on to state...that we do not propagate (2) "Cape colouredism" but are struggling for a state where "all in S.A will be considered one people."

From these we can gather (a) that Mr Peake does not recognise the Coloured people as a particular identifiable group, but that they are merely "so-called" to distinguish "political" differences from other sections. It can also be taken that all other national groupings in S.A. fall into the "so-called" category, and that we should have called ourselves the S.A. so-called Coloured Peoples' Organisation.

(b) that Mr Peake overlooks the stage in the struggle in S.A. which is for the establishment of a democratic state where all national groups have equal rights...and not merely to be lumped together as "people".

This guarantee is contained in the second section of the Freedom Charter, to the formulation of which Mr Peake is said to have contributed considerably at the C.O.P. [Congress of the People]...

Mr Peake apparently forgets that at the C.O.P. 3 000 delegates elected from all parts came together, sank their differences, and drew up the Freedom Charter as a common programme for co-operation...Further than that differences cannot be sunk. We must accept the Freedom Charter as the basis for co-operation between all political groups interested in the cause of liberation, or else treat it merely as another propaganda leaflet. We in SACPO maintain that the basis for co-operation has been laid down in the Freedom Charter – the task now is to see it implemented – by the people.³³

There could be no quarter given to formerly close associates whose opinions coincided with supporters of the Unity Movement. According to La Guma, Peake believed that SACPO was 'struggling for a state where "all in S.A. will be considered one people"'. For La Guma, in an argument that repeated the tropes of Lenin's attack on Trotsky in *Disruption of Unity Under Cover of Outcries of Unity*, '[a]ppeals to sink ["]differences" can only be directed to those individuals who aspire to leadership of the people – form [*sic*] they who differ'. He recommended that Peake 'should stick to clear and precise politics and not be overwhelmed by pseudo-intellectual phrase-mongering that will lead him only into the camp of the unconstructive critics and enemies of the Congress movement'.³⁴

Is this an invitation to a dinner?

La Guma was one of the 156 men and women who were arrested on charges of treason in late 1956 and early 1957. The state based its case against them on the argument that a 'Liberatory Movement' existed in South Africa. Among the organisations it associated with the 'Liberatory Movement' were the World Peace Council, the Communist Party of South Africa, the South African Peace Council, the South African Congress of Democrats, the South African Congress of Trade Unions, the African National Congress, the South African Indian Congress, the Friends of the Soviet Union, the South African Coloured Peoples Organisation and the Federation of South African Women. The newspaper *New Age* was also indicted.³⁵ In a rare but significant reversal of apartheid thinking which often assumed that Africans were incapable of independent action and were therefore guided by the hidden hand of (white) communists, the prosecution argued that the ANC was the conspiracy's 'senior partner'. In so doing it acknowledged that 'if the case failed against the ANC it must fail against the other organisations'.³⁶

According to the *Treason Trial Defence Fund Press Summary*,

The gist of the Crown's charge of High Treason is that the accused, acting in concert, and through the instrumentality of their organisations, prepared

to subvert the existing State by illegal means including...force and violence; and to replace [it] with a State founded on principles differing fundamentally from those on which the present state is constituted.³⁷

The whole trial lasted five years and eventually all defendants were acquitted on all charges. During its course, the number of defendants decreased as the Crown's case grew weaker and the testimony of its 'expert witnesses' was undermined and discredited.³⁸

By the time 'Etude' appeared La Guma was on trial for high treason. Blanche la Guma has described the circumstances of his arrest:

In February 1956 our first child, a son, was born. We called him Eugene and in December of that same year I returned home at 9.00 a.m. from a midwifery case for which I left home at 2.00 am, Alex being in bed. My mother, with whom we lived at the time, looked distraught and worried and told me that Alex had been arrested at 4.00 am by the security police. I immediately phoned the lawyer, whom I was told had also been arrested. On phoning the *New Age* office, I heard that people there had been arrested.³⁹

The prisoners were flown to Johannesburg and held in the Johannesburg Fort. On 19 December La Guma was released on bail. The trialists might all receive the same sentence but apartheid's racial classification determined bail terms and amounts. At £250, 'Europeans' paid the highest amount, 'Indians and Asiatics' paid £100, while 'Africans and coloured persons' were required to put up £50. Bail conditions prevented them from attending political meetings and they had to report every Thursday before 10.00 am to a designated police station.⁴⁰ Preliminary hearings started in 1957 in Johannesburg and later moved to Pretoria – which La Guma described as 'a suburb of the Voortrekker Monument' – where the trial proper began.

The partners of several trialists moved to Johannesburg during the trial, but the La Gumas felt it would be better if Blanche stayed in Cape Town:

Eugene was 10 months old when Alex was arrested, I'm building up a practice here. We thought it would be better for me to stay here and build up a practice here so that when Alex comes home I've got a home for him... If he doesn't come home... I still have to provide a home for Eugene. My aim was to work here, and to work like blazes, to try to get a home and to get Eugene into some degree of stability... I think that most of the other wives went up... and of course when he came home I had bought a house in Garlandale. But he came home to a *home* and could start becoming stabilised immediately.⁴¹

Although the Crown used La Guma's speeches and writing as part of its evidence, Stanley Lollan was the main accused representative of SACPO. The Crown's evidence against La Guma indicates that the police had been monitoring his activities and speeches in the months before and after the Congress of the People. Evidence against him was based on excerpts from speeches made at public meetings on Cape Town's Grand Parade on 29 May 1955, 8 June 1955, 3 July 1955, 11 December 1955, 13 March 1956, 15 April 1956; at the ninth annual general meeting of the Natal Indian Congress in Durban on 22 June 1956. There was also a manuscript, 'A single spark can start a prairie fire', whose title La Guma had adopted from a slogan made popular by Mao Zedong.⁴² The Crown handed in some 6 000 documents with which it intended to convict the 156 defendants. It concluded its submission with material taken from 11 'co-conspirators' from Cape Town.⁴³ With some documents referring to the most mundane of circumstances and relationships, it is not surprising that La Guma's early reports for *Fighting Talk* reflected the tedium of the event:

The cop at the door looks bored, he tilts his chair and eases his gun harness, stares at the hessian ceiling as if he sees something hypnotic up

there. In front of me a ladybird crawls carefully up Archie Patel's chair... Somewhere voices clack metallically.

Duplicated copy of a speech by Lillian Ngoyi.

Yes, your worship, I hand in this document.

...Peace Council...

Do you know a man named Stanley Lollan?...

Pamphlet called 'New Life in China', by Ruth First.

I hand in this document, your worship...

Is this an invitation to a dinner...?

Yes, your worship. I hand it in.

In the wire dock the accused spend five and a quarter hours each day...

The ladybird encounters an obstacle in a projecting fold... The tiny body goes into reverse for a few minute paces.

Did you, on 26th September, search...

In ordinary life there is a variety of things which make life interesting. Here life has become a fixed pattern; a routine; a monotonous repetition like a machine turning out bottle tops...⁴⁴

There were frequent breaks in the trial's labyrinthine proceedings during which he often returned to Cape Town. In February 1957 he was in Cape Town for his son Eugene's first birthday and, between mid-November and mid-December 1957 he wrote the articles on the 1958 elections from Cape Town.⁴⁵

It was also a time for reading: 'one kind person presented me with a book with a quotation from John Donne on the flyleaf, which says: "No man is an island entire of himself; he is part of the continent, a piece of the main."' That book was Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. 'I like the sentiments,' said La Guma before undermining the gravity and nobility of Donne and Hemingway: 'Another friend, well-intentioned, I'm sure, gave me a copy of Julius Fuick's *Notes From the Gallows* !!! But the present I really do like is the easy folding chair. It will replace the hard-

backed Seat Number 85 in the Drill Hall next week.⁴⁶ We can trace La Guma's interest in the Spanish Civil War to his thirteenth year, but Hemingway's influence on him appears to have remained relatively dormant until the early 1960s when his short stories show traces of Hemingway's style. During the middle and late 1970s, when he made the trip on which much of *A Soviet Journey* was based and *Time of the Butcherbird* appeared, Hemingway's influence resurfaced. Both texts refer to La Pilar, though it is possible that the former text contains an element of self-parody.⁴⁷ Chapter Six will examine his short stories in more detail.

The trial was also a platform from which he could attack apartheid and demonstrate the validity of the Congress Alliance's approach by stressing the link between the ideas of a new nation and the working class. This nation constituted a new audience. At the beginning of the trial he felt 'surrounded by South Africa. Damons, Nthite, Hoogendyk, Horvitch, Moonsamy, Shanley. Workers, housewives, clerks, lawyers, journalists, doctors, priests, trade unionists', and by May Day 1957 the trialists had, as we have seen, become 'a great family of brothers and sisters, a marvellous picture of a New South Africa.'⁴⁸ Later I shall show that he achieved this sense of unity in other ways.

In December 1957 high treason charges were withdrawn against 61 defendants, and in February 1958 four more were discharged. During February, March and April La Guma's coverage of the 1958 election campaign indicates that he was in Cape Town, and in May shots were fired at him in his Garlandale home.⁴⁹ 'Time to Think', which appeared in the August 1958 issue of *Fighting Talk*, reflects on this period and on the Treason Trial Defence Fund's catering arrangements:

Lunch in the grounds of the rectory with Father Nye as host, tall, lean, smiling, passing around the cigarettes. Would you like some more bread and butter? Orange squash? The Committee has done sterling work. The stews and curries, not too hot, to suit everyone's taste. Somebody's even donated ice-cream. Like a garden party. Should've worn my morning pants and top-hat...⁵⁰

By August, charges against Henry Makgothi had been withdrawn and the court had thrown out one of the more significant allegations – ‘that the accused advocated, advised or defended or encouraged the achievement of any of the objects of communism’.⁵¹ By late September the Crown had accepted that its case depended upon on its conspiracy theory, and that if it failed to prove this, then ‘all of the accused would go free’.⁵² By mid-October 1958 the case had collapsed, but 91 of the original 156 were still technically under arrest.⁵³ However the Crown persisted in its efforts to prove the existence of conspiracy to commit treason, and in mid-November a *Government Gazette* announced that the remaining 91 defendants would be retried in two separate groups. The first group would go on trial in January 1959 and the second group of 61, including La Guma, in April that year.⁵⁴ In April 1959 the group of 61 was split into two further groups of 30 and 31 with two new indictments and two new summonses. La Guma was in the group of 31. The groups faced similar charges.⁵⁵ That month charges against them were quashed, but it was announced that they could be indicted again.⁵⁶

By mid-June La Guma was back in Cape Town. He was arrested with Ronald Segal (editor and founder of the journal *Africa South* which had published one of La Guma's early short stories), and Joe Morolong in Nyanga in possession of some 3 000 pamphlets. The pamphlets publicised the campaign to boycott goods produced by firms that supported the National Party. They were driven in convoy ‘along the dark and silent roads to the Phillipi police-station’:

In the station police-constables, unused to catches of this kind, came to stare through the windows. Mr Segal was removed to the Europeans Only side...

A security man came in carrying the leaflets and said to his man: ‘Count.’

‘All of them?’ asked a surprised detective. ‘One by one?’

‘One by one.’

They counted the leaflets on their fingers. Somewhere in the background another detective said: 'Tonight we've got Up My Alley with us.'...

A detective examining a leaflet sneered, 'Who heard of a kaffir smoking___,' naming an expensive English cigarette. The desk sergeant looked at us and said, 'Why don't they b'ycott wine and brendy, huh?'⁵⁷

It was not the only occasion on which he mentioned his other audience or imitated its pronunciation. La Guma certainly did not write for them, but he was sufficiently aware of their interest and the status it gave him in their eyes to include another reference to the experience of watching those who watched him. We can see this in another Up My Alley piece that he wrote the following year. This appeared after his release from a five-month period of detention without trial in Worcester:

Of course, I must not leave out the Special Branch dick who looked in at the exercise yard in Worcester and said somewhat wearily to his pal who was chatting to me: 'It's no use talking to him. He'll just put it in Up My Alley.'

Such is fame.⁵⁸

The trial resumed in July 1959, with the Crown presenting a 'comprehensive document' which it would use to show that the organisations on trial had a policy of violence. Included in the material it felt would show that the organisations were '[a]dvocating and propagating unconstitutional and illegal action, including the use of violence' and were '[p]reparing and conditioning the population for the overthrow of the State by violence' was La Guma's speech on the Grand Parade of 13 March 1956 in which he had called for extra-parliamentary action. Under '[e]vidence to show the susceptible condition of the bulk of the Union's Native population', the Crown submitted excerpts from a document already mentioned that

the security police had taken from his home.⁵⁹ Political analysis and poetic device converge in its title, 'A single spark can start a prairie fire':

A single spark can cause a prairie fire, i.e. although the fire is only a small one it will develop rapidly...S.A. is littered all over with dry firewood which will soon be rekindled into a conflagration. We need only look at the development of the militancy (?) of the people, the Defiance campaign, the strikes of the non-European workers, the Congress of the People to see that it will not take long for these sparks to become a 'prairie fire'.⁶⁰

Presumably the draft of an intended speech, this text demonstrates La Guma's continuing adherence to the view that South Africa could be best understood and liberated through an analysis based on notions of imperialism and the thesis that South Africa represented a colonialism of a special type:

Contradictions are developing internationally between imperialist countries between countries and their colonies – between imperialists and the proletariat of these countries – the imperialists and the people of Africa – the contradictions between the imperialist oppressor in S.A. and the vast masses of non-Europeans – the exploitation of the African people...⁶¹

The document also indicates La Guma's support for the two-stage theory. He wrote that 'the first objective of the National struggle, can only be the dismissal of the imperialists, the return of the land to the landless population and those with little land, the African, Coloured and Indian peasantry and European farmers'. The remaining industries could remain 'in the hands of their former owners...if they agree to work under the control of the people'.⁶²

By late October 1959 La Guma had returned to Cape Town for the funeral of Lionel Forman. In his commemoration speech La Guma combined two related themes which had emerged during the Treason Trial. These were the Donne

epigraph from *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and how progressive whites had overcome the objective determinants of their class interests. Like Ben Turok who had 'succeeded in adopting the world outlook of the working man', Forman had managed to adopt 'a world outlook'.⁶³

In January the following year the case against 'Adams and 29 others' resumed, but the indictments against the remaining 61 were quashed.⁶⁴ Technically, La Guma was free, but from March to September he was detained without trial during the state of emergency that followed the Sharpeville massacre. Though he had been found not guilty, the Crown continued to use extracts from his speeches in their case against the remaining trialists. During this period, Lollan testified about the effect of the Group Areas Act and Job Reservation on coloureds and denied that SACPO had ever used violence. The organisation had used 'deputations; several demonstrations in front of the Houses of Parliament [and] mass protest meetings'. He confirmed that SACPO could not negotiate on the terms offered by apartheid and rejected qualifications to the franchise or its piecemeal introduction: 'You cannot achieve the franchise by gradual means', he argued.⁶⁵

As the prosecution's case grew increasingly untenable, so the quality of its evidence deteriorated. In January 1961 it argued that SACPO was part of the treason conspiracy because two of its members were former CPSA members. By this time, *New Age* was confident that none of the charges would hold up. The trial judges could not be considered liberal by the standards of the time, and in their summing up they stated that

If the case failed against the ANC it must fail against the other organisations... The case for the Crown is that during the indictment period... a number of organisations in South Africa... co-operated with each other to achieve their common object and for that purpose an alliance was established... the Congress Alliance with the ANC as the senior and dominant partner... the indictment alleges that the intention was to overthrow the State by violence and to substitute for [it]... a Communist

State...the prosecution...has failed to show that the ANC as a matter of policy intended to achieve this new State by violent means'.⁶⁶

Technically the defendants were free and the legality of their methods and organisations, if not already banned, had been vindicated. But as events such as detention without trial during the Trial itself, and the shots fired at La Guma on two occasions showed, the apartheid state would pursue its opponents even more ruthlessly in future.⁶⁷

Liberashun! Wake up!

With *New Age* staff members such as Lionel Forman, Fred Carneson, Alex la Guma, Tennyson Makiwane, Wilton Mkwazi and Brian and Sonia Bunting among the Treason Trial defendants, the paper suffered considerable financial and logistical problems.⁶⁸ It survived by using volunteers, by cutting the number of pages and by putting the existing staff on reduced salaries. Blanche continued with her midwifery practice and at times the family received additional financial assistance from groups that supported Treason Trial defendants. It is unlikely that financial factors encouraged La Guma to write, though any money received for stories was welcome. His preferred publications, such as *New Age* and *Africa South*, had not paid and would not pay large sums for his stories. Had his motives been financial, he would have written more often, for other publications and on less political topics – and he had already expressed a stronger desire to be a writer than to hold office in SACPO. Through the pieces published in *New Age*, *Drum* and *Africa South* he laid the basis for a personal style and found confirmation of himself as a writer. At the same time, though bail conditions restricted him La Guma remained politically active. For instance, he was one of 'a number of prominent South Africans of all races and in all walks of life' who expressed their 'grave anxiety over the invasion of Egyptian territory by British, French and Israeli forces'.⁶⁹ In addition to his journalism, La Guma produced a modest portfolio of sketches at the start of the Treason Trial to which he gave the title "'The Fort" Prison Johannesburg 1956'. Between 1959

and 1961 – the later years of the trial – he produced a comic-strip, published two short stories and completed the manuscript of *A Walk in the Night*, while in 1962 the style and content of his Up My Alley column in *New Age* changed sufficiently to warrant a separate analysis.

Alfred Hutchinson's [Fig. 4.1] account of prison life in the Fort stresses the mutually supportive relationships between the Treason Trial prisoners and shows how they used their time. Some of La Guma's sketches, which covered a range of prison activities and people, complement his descriptions. There were prisoners who used the occasion for political education:

The joint sessions of the "upper" and "lower" house are an inspiration [Fig. 4.2]...Rev. Calata speaking on music; Prof. Matthews on the American Negro [Fig. 4.3]; Dr. Letele on African medicine; Debi Singh outlining the history of the struggles of the Indian people... Chief Luthuli joining hands in dedication and rededication to the fight for freedom [Fig. 4.3]. And then the burst of song, beginning sometimes as a solitary voice and gathering strength until it is an irresistible torrent making the walls ring with sound.⁷⁰

La Guma also sketched his fellow prisoners while they read newspapers [Figs 4.4, 4.5], played cards or chess [Fig. 4.6], or endured haircuts [Fig. 4.7]. Alfred Hutchinson has provided an equally graphic representation of prison life:

...The fraternity of strong men in the "lower house" building muscles...Joe Modise in his enthusiasm landing up in the prison hospital. Robert Resha taking longer rests than exercise spells, "General China" Chamile [Fig. 4.5] whittling at his wooden spoons. Mosie Moolla constantly posing in the hope that Alex La Guma will deign to sketch him. Dr. Naicker and his "small walks". The perennial youthfulness of Rev. Gawe, found where the song is

thickest and the dancing most spirited... And Mini's glorious voice riding the sea of song like an unerring pilot homeward-bound.⁷¹

The sketches provide interesting details of the trialists' daily lives. Some, such as Mandela [Fig. 4.8], are poor likenesses. However, conditions did not permit La Guma to make corrections. Provided with a sketchbook but no pencils or eraser, La Guma used blue ballpoint. This was not a medium that left much room for error. In that respect his sketches should be seen as first impressions.

La Guma was not the only Trialist with artistic inclinations. Ike Horvitch also made several profile sketches of defendants. These included Hymie Barsel, Joe Slovo, Lionel Forman, Sampie Malope and Sabantu Makazana which were published by *New Age* during January and February 1957. Only two sketches by Horvitch deal with prison life, and like La Guma he drew the prison barber at work. Horvitch was less concerned with prison life and individuality than La Guma. His drawing of the interior of the Synagogue in Pretoria [Fig. 4.9] gave readers a better sense of the environment in which trialists found themselves day after day.⁷²

Liberation Chabalala appeared in 37 consecutive issues of *New Age* between 5 March and 12 November 1959.⁷³ It challenged boundaries between politics and popular culture in the 'serious' *New Age*, but it was not the first modern South African comic-strip. In December 1956, *Drum* began its comic-strip serial *Goombi The Great Goom!* This appeared more or less every month until December 1958.⁷⁴ Since La Guma's serial precedes his longer prose fiction, there is a good case for arguing that it, not the acclaimed novella *A Walk in the Night*, was La Guma's first major published work. If this is so, then exploration of La Guma's interest in and debt to aspects of popular culture will provide us with additional perspectives on the novelist in whom most critics have found Gorky, Dostoyevsky and American Naturalism rather than Popeye, Krazy Kat, Juliet Jones and the Katzenjammer Kids.⁷⁵

A number of critics have used graphic or artistic images to describe La Guma's novels and short stories, but we should not confuse this with analysis of his graphic

work.⁷⁶ At least four factors have contributed to the comic's low profile. Firstly, La Guma himself has directed attention away from it by stressing an interest dating from childhood in 'serious works, both political and literary' in which his father encouraged him.⁷⁷ However, friends and relatives have indicated other interests that do not always support this linear progression. While he was still in South Africa these interests included detective stories by James Hadley Chase and Raymond Chandler; Damon Runyon's romanticised New York underworld; newspaper comics such as the Katzenjammer Kids, Big Ben Bolt and Juliet Jones which he read in the late 1950s; local manifestations of popular culture such as the Coon Carnival; the cinema in general and Westerns in particular throughout his life.⁷⁸ During the early years of exile, he worked on a detective series.⁷⁹

A second reason for the comic's low profile is that La Guma's prose fiction has always been more accessible. Until the early 1990s, the comic could only be found in publications that had been banned in South Africa since the early 1960s. Thirdly, the critics who have acknowledged the strip have not dealt with its graphic and experimental qualities. In his seminal thesis, Gareth Cornwell notes La Guma's 'mischievous and irreverent sense of humour that can be glimpsed once or twice in the short stories, but is never allowed to disturb the severe concentration of the novels'. He adds that La Guma 'even wrote and drew a comic-strip in *New Age*... which followed the picaresque adventures of one Liberation Chabalala', but does not develop this observation.⁸⁰ The general movement from 'irreverence' to 'severe concentration' is undeniable but *The Stone Country*, La Guma's third novel, suggests that images derived from popular culture were present in later, more serious works. In an otherwise comprehensive analysis of La Guma's output, Chandramohan stresses *Little Libby's* contribution to the depiction of ethnic groups not usually found in La Guma's fiction. Here Chandramohan mentions 'African society of the 1950s' and 'the political contribution' of 'the Indian community'.⁸¹ The highest concentrations of *New Age* readers were to be found among Africans living in the Eastern Cape and Johannesburg. According to Albie Sachs, La Guma 'deliberately chose an African Liberation Chabalala to give it [the comic] a more

universal appeal...it was part of the broad non-racialism of *New Age*'.⁸² This also accounts for La Guma's use of slogans such as "'Asihamba" ["as we go along"] as a link' between episodes.⁸³ (In general, La Guma had a weak grasp of Nguni languages.) However, Chandramohan pays very little attention to *Liberation Chabalala* as a *comic*. Despite the impact of cultural studies on the analysis of literature and the steady and welcome erosion of barriers between 'high' and 'popular' culture in the analysis of images and texts, few critics have explored the numerous signs of La Guma's interest in popular culture scattered throughout his novels. Nor have they considered the possibility that a more subversive, anarchic and anti-establishment La Guma existed alongside the serious and politically correct public persona.

The Treason Trial brought many changes to his life, his political options and to his output. It was also the first time since infancy that he had been to Johannesburg, and there are several indications from his satirical column 'Up My Alley' and the comic-strip that he saw it as 'the big city'. This view coincides with popular perceptions of Cape Town as smaller and more relaxed than brash, bustling and dangerous Johannesburg [Fig. 4.10], which he compared with 'Chicago in the heyday of Al Capone, John Dillinger and the hectic days of illegal booze'.⁸⁴ In this respect his image of Johannesburg consolidated the Americanisation of urban African experience that the magazine *Drum* had already popularised and mythologised. There were also more specific references from 'Up My Alley' that found their way into the strip. These references included Johannesburg's Chinatown [Fig. 4.11]; 'a quartet of the "Ghost squad"', a plain-clothes police snatch squad that enforced the pass laws, [Fig. 4.12]; the ruins of Sophiatown [Fig. 4.13]; Vrededorp, former home of the novelist Peter Abrahams, now on the eve of its destruction 'awaiting the Group Areas axe'.⁸⁵ Thus by the time *Little Libby* appeared, La Guma had a useful 'bank' of textual images with which *New Age* readers who had followed his 'Up My Alley' column would already be familiar. Some, like the *Drum*-oriented images, were public property while others were based on his own writing and sense of humour and gave the strip its personal trademark.

The trial restricted the news-gathering opportunities open to *New Age* and *Fighting Talk* journalists. La Guma and his colleagues continued with conventional news reporting whenever possible, but he and other journalists on *New Age* had to find discourses and forms of representation that could travel well between Cape Town, Johannesburg and Pretoria and which could adapt to unpredictable interruptions.⁸⁶ From this perspective, the reviews that La Guma wrote for *New Age*, his 'Up My Alley' column and *Little Libby* were convenient and pragmatic solutions.⁸⁷ In addition to the implications already mentioned, the reviews have significance for his views on the relationship between popular and high culture and their audiences. In his Emyln Williams review La Guma does not argue that 'folk' art is the product of an egalitarian society, or that there is no distinction between 'popular' and 'fine' art. Rather, as we have seen, he places value on an unmediated relationship between performer and audience – an impossible and nostalgic fantasy – in which they share the same outlook.⁸⁸ La Guma's choice of the comic genre articulates his desire for direct communication with his audience. This genre is a popular graphic and narrative form which is immediately and directly enjoyed by many and whose conventions are widely understood – but only because the popular culture of the USA was so pervasive that it became an invisible form of mediation.

La Guma's picaresque comic-strip story combined features of caricature and animated film cartoon with comments on the concerns and campaigns of the Congress Alliance. It was topical in another respect, for at least four of the characters were named after people involved in the Treason Trail. Mustapha Moonsamy and Liberation Chabalala (aka Little Libby) were probably derived from Treason Trialists K. Moonsamy and 'Chubby' Tshabalala. La Guma described the latter as 'a young man with an elfish face and an indomitable spirit'. 'Sgt Shark of the Special Branch' probably came from Sgt Sharp, a prosecution witness whom the trialists reviled as both ugly and stupid, as La Guma's sarcastic description of him as 'matinée idol of the treason trial' suggests [Fig. 4.11]. In 1960, towards the end of the trial, the presiding judges described Sharp as a 'dangerous witness' and struck out his evidence.⁸⁹ The newspaper *New Age* also featured in the story, because as a

'legal person' it too was on trial along with at least eight of its employees.⁹⁰ The strip also enabled La Guma to develop characters such as Oom Veldskoek van der Mielieblaar [Fig. 4.15] who reappeared two years later as an inhabitant of La Guma's mythical backveld Afrikaner republic of Pampoen-onder-die-Bos.⁹¹ Like 'Up My Alley', *Little Libby* gave La Guma more freedom of political and narrative expression than his more conventional journalism and fiction, or the times, usually permitted. Also, by using satire as a common denominator La Guma established a symbiotic relationship between his comics and journalism during this period.

In the comic the relationships between caricatures, cartoons, concerns and campaigns are articulated in three ways. Firstly, within the narrative there are several references to political events and debates during the late 1950s. SACTU's 1957 campaign for a minimum wage of £1-a-day occurred after the start of the Treason Trial and was significant in at least two respects. It demonstrated continued resistance to the apartheid state, and it represented a departure from the relatively limited industrial unionism that had characterised African labour organisation since the 1930s. La Guma may also have had in mind the Congress Alliance stay-at-homes of 1957 and 1958. While the first stay-at-home complemented SACTU's campaign and contributed to a rise in wages, the latter occurred in the year of a general election, and on this occasion the state responded with much greater violence. Consequently, it was regarded as less successful than its predecessor had been.⁹²

Secondly, we can understand aspects of the comic in the context of debates about the political value and significance of the boycott as a strategic or tactical intervention. One element of this was the 1958 general election. In the comic-strip this debate was played out through the Bethal farm labour scandal of 1959 to which the first five published episodes of the strip refer. *New Age* was one of the publications that covered this story in detail. The ANC had been trying to improve the conditions of farm labourers in the area since 1947. By the late 1950s, Africans who were unemployed or who had been arrested on pass law offences faced the choice of prosecution or between six and twelve months of farm labour. By 1953, 32 582 had been sent to the farms. In the late 1950s publications such as *Drum* and

New Age took up the issue, and this led to a potato boycott which started in June 1959.⁹³ If La Guma did not meet any of the Bethal labourers, it is possible that he heard about them from other trialists such as Hutchinson and read one of the pamphlets about Bethal. When he was held at Marshall Square police station awaiting transfer to the Fort, Hutchinson encountered a 'group of boys [who] noisily recount their adventures in Bethal and the potato fields. They are afraid, for all their big talk.'⁹⁴ Another aspect of the boycott debate can be found within the panels that contain graffiti, pamphlets and posters that publicise meetings and call on people to observe the stay-at-home, not to eat potatoes [Fig. 4.14], or to buy goods produced by firms that supported the National Party. The Congress Alliance felt that its boycott had 'tremendous potential' because it gave 'the man in the street an immediate and effective way of hitting back against the innumerable injustices and hardships inflicted upon him by the Government'. The policy had particular significance for the Cape, SACPO's most important area and the base for elements of manufacturing and finance capital that supported the Nationalist Party.⁹⁵ Simultaneously disarming and politicising, the posters within the panels add texture to the narrative's reliance on a combination of the political and the picaresque.

Thirdly, there is the presence of a small mouse. Sometimes the mouse comments on events or exhorts readers to political action [Fig. 4.14], or participates in the action and intervenes in events that occur in the main panels [Fig. 4.15]. Like Ignatz, Herriman's creation of 1910 in *Krazy Kat*, La Guma's mouse displays little respect for the idea of a stable relationship between caption and picture that comprises the primary convention of comics. Like Ignatz, La Guma's mouse also challenges the established order by enacting the empowerment of the powerless. This gives the strip an instability and unpredictability that offsets its general reliance on slapstick and mock drama.⁹⁶ In La Guma's total output there were very few exceptions to the temporary or enacted surrender of the control of narrative or argument found in the comic, and they appear to have been confined to early work such as 'Ten Days in Roeland Street Jail' which Chapter Three analysed.⁹⁷ Later, his semi-autobiographical prison novel *The Stone Country* would mark the return of the

mouse in a more serious guise, though even here its links with popular culture and cartoons remained obvious.⁹⁸ Chapter Seven will cover this.

With formal art training, a background in journalism, an enjoyment of popular cultural forms and a route to novel writing via the short story, La Guma could easily absorb comic-strip conventions. If Eisner's advice to prospective comic-strip artists and scriptwriters – that 'a steady diet of reading, particularly in the short story form, is essential to plotting and narrative skills' holds good – then La Guma was well prepared for this medium despite a lack of formal training.⁹⁹ As a comparison between characters such as Rhumba, Little Libby and Mustapha Moonsamy suggests, he also appears to have been influenced by developments in American newspaper comic characterisation and representation in the late 1930s. This approach facilitated the combination of characters drawn in different styles.¹⁰⁰ La Guma's characters fall into two broad groups, though many of them were drawn with the same stick-like simplicity. There were stock characters like Kasper Katchum, Oom Veldskoen [Fig. 4.15], the curvaceous Rhumba [Fig. 4.12], a large shebeen queen [Fig. 4.11], a Chinese laundry man [Fig. 4.11], a pot-bellied policeman speaking in broken English/Afrikaans, sharp-suited tsotsis [Fig. 4.13], a gang leader called Chopper [Fig. 4.18], and a thick-lipped African car thief named Bongo. [4.18] While most had incidental roles, others such as Rhumba or Chopper were more important and interacted with individual characters like Little Libby, Mustapha Moonsamy and Sgt Shark. Their names required only slight alliterative adjustments to ensure that *New Age* readers familiar with Treason Trial proceedings would recognise the real individuals and enjoy the humour of their transformations. Simultaneously the relationship between 'stock' and 'individual' characters in the comic also throws some light on plot and characterisation in La Guma's later novels that I will examine in the next chapter.

In the form of curvaceous heroines who always landed up in trouble and had to be rescued, Rhumba had several precedents. Her name also carried political implications, for the 'rhumba' or 'rumba' is a dance that supposedly originated in Cuba, and it is possible that through this name La Guma was making an indirect

reference to the Cuban revolution which had seen Castro take power earlier that year.¹⁰¹ The following year, La Guma's Cuban references left less room for doubt when he mocked 'some Yankees... belly-aching over the large dose of Castro oil they have swallowed now that Cuba's big boy is in New York.'¹⁰² Here La Guma works a pun on the medicinal effects of castor oil and Castrol, the motor car oil.

La Guma was not alone in his attempts to combine images of the female body with a political message. In 1962 *Die Banier*, a conservative Afrikaans monthly aimed primarily at rural coloureds used a photograph of a woman in a bathing costume to illustrate the 'vital statistics' of the coloured population, and in 1947 the Southern edition of *New Age* had organised a 'gigantic beauty contest'. The editors assured readers that this contest was different from other beauty contests organised by the capitalist press because contestants had to be paid-up members of a recognised trade union. In 1958 the paper organised another such event.¹⁰³ It is also possible that La Guma used the name Rhumba to introduce references to working class coloured culture from the Cape, for the rhumba features in at least one *moppie*.¹⁰⁴ If La Guma used Rhumba to 'import' elements of coloured working-class culture into the Johannesburg-based story, then it is also possible, as fellow *Quartet* contributor Alf Wannenburg has suggested, that the name Little Libby was an oblique *homage* to *Lieberstein*, a recently launched popular cheap wine of the sort which another of La Guma's contemporaries, the poet Dennis Brutus, remembers that La Guma enjoyed.¹⁰⁵

Another comic-strip convention from the 1930s that La Guma drew on was the use of 'descriptive phrases and subheads' for narrative continuity, though he did not deploy these consistently. The phrases and subheads are in mechanical type below the hand-drawn masthead [Fig. 4.11]. They correspond to the authoritative disembodied voice at the start and end of each episode of a radio and cinema serial that frames the narrative and summarises significant events from the previous episode.¹⁰⁶ Within the story itself there were sometimes panels through which the narrator intervened to provide additional continuity, onomatopoeic sound effects, or instructions to readers such as 'Interval'. Again this suggests that films and the

experience of being in a cinema were strong but parodied influences, and that La Guma used this shared experience to draw in and estrange or 'alienate' his readers by using a familiar trope to interrupt the narrative at unexpected points [Fig. 4.10]. Not all of these panels contained the mouse, and generally they were narrower than those that carried the action. Often they were reversed into white text on a black background. However, there were also points in a tier when he dispensed with panels, thereby establishing a stronger contrast with its surroundings and stressing the message it communicated [Figs 4.10, 4.15].

By today's standards, La Guma's use of perspective and narrative compression – that is the tendency in comics to combine a number of events in one panel – was restrained. The pace of his story is even and sedate, with seldom more than one event per panel. In the majority of panels, except when characters run, the observer is at eye level with the events, most of which are set in the middle distance and with three-quarters of the body depicted. However, when La Guma wanted to make a particular point he used a variety of techniques. These included rapid shifts between bird's-eye and worm's-eye views to communicate a sense of movement and confusion [Fig. 4.10], close ups of a political leaflet to stress its importance, of a face to highlight emotions or of a butcher's cleaver to emphasise danger [Fig. 4.18]. In the latter case, he combined a close up with a sharp distinction between bright light and darkness that he could have copied from the *film noir* gangster genre, for this part of the comic-strip takes place in Chopper's headquarters just before a robbery.

People are human beings before they are politicians or revolutionaries
 It is difficult to determine exactly when La Guma produced each episode of the strip, though we know that by the end of the story he had no more than three instalments in hand. The first five episodes cover political events of 1959 and 1957 combined. From there onwards preparations for the 1957 and/or 1958 one-day stay-at-home provide the continuity of the narrative and its political goal, while Libby's diversion with the gangsters is a subplot. The posters advocating a potato boycott

first appear in episode 16 (on 18 June 1959), three issues after the boycott started. While adding texture, they remain incidental to the narrative, and could have been added later to provide greater immediacy or to vary the source of the strip's humour. If this is the case, then it is possible that La Guma first conceptualised the start at what is now around episode six when Libby arrives in Johannesburg (like La Guma himself at the start of the Treason Trial) and that the first five episodes, which combine 1959, 1958 and 1957 events, were conceptualised later but appeared first. Alternatively, he might have conceptualised the first five episodes without thinking about how to continue the series, then found himself desperately looking for some way to move the series forward and resolved it by introducing an autobiographical and topical element. While there is no proof for either hypothesis, the omniscient narrator effects transition between episodes five and six in a clumsy manner with the phrase 'And our hero is off on a new adventure', whereas episodes six to 37 display a far more integrated narrative and hang together more satisfactorily, though they are less dramatic.

Whatever the sequence of production, this combination of past and present has a paradoxical effect intrinsic to satire and other forms of oblique political commentary. It gives the comic political relevance *and* prevents us from making a direct connection between subject matter and the immediate political concerns of the readers. Like La Guma's use of names from the Treason Trial, he created an environment that was simultaneously 'real' and 'imaginary'.

In the order of appearance the story runs as follows: as the dawn breaks Little Libby, an African schoolboy, sets off for school; he is kidnapped by 'Kasper Katchum' and sold to an exploitative farmer, 'Oom Veldskoen van der Mielieblaar'. Libby mobilises the workers who rebel against oppressive working conditions and demand '£1-a-day'; they release the farmer's 'prize red bull', and it chases away the farmer (episodes one to five). Libby then goes to Johannesburg where he is befriended by the curvaceous Rhumba; the 'Ghost Squad' arrests her, but the love-struck Mustapha Moonsamy and his *New Age* colleagues (episodes 6 to 15) rescue her. Meanwhile 'Sergeant Shark of the Special Branch' follows Libby to a shebeen

where he joins in the festivities and is arrested in the subsequent police raid (episodes 16-25). Libby escapes the raid and meets up with Mustapha and Rhumba; they persuade him to 'do some work for the stay-at-home'. Armed with leaflets, Libby meets members of a criminal gang who use promises of wealth to persuade him to join them in a robbery. The gangsters dump his leaflet and he meets Chopper, the gang boss. The police interrupt the robbery and Libby escapes amidst the shooting. As the dawn breaks over the city, he recovers his leaflets and distributes them to enthusiastic workers (episodes 26-37). The effect of the stay-at-home is not covered. Given the relative success of the 1957 stay-at-home, the abrupt and anti-climactic ending might suggest that La Guma was less than happy with the results of the 1958 stay-at-home.¹⁰⁷ The comic ends here without any conclusion, and while he does not appear to have been detained, he seems to have been out of circulation for a while. Perhaps La Guma needed to finish *A Walk in the Night*, for two weeks after *Little Libby* had ended, he wrote in 'Up My Alley' of 'three weeks of relief from the salt mines' and complained that '[r]eturn to civilisation also entails reading back numbers of newspapers'.¹⁰⁸ Like 'Up My Alley', whose first and last entries contained the same quotation from Tom Paine on the need for true democrats as opposed to fair-weather ones, *Little Libby* begins with the dawn, when Liberation should arise, and ends with the dawn when the people should rise up against oppression.

According to Blanche la Guma, *Little Libby* was

...a great seller. It was quite strange. It [*New Age*] was a very serious paper and to bring out a lighter side in the paper was this [comic] script [strip] on *Little Libby*. Eventually it emerged that the sales were doing quite well because people were trying to get hold of *Little Libby*...because people are human beings before they are politicians or revolutionaries....Something light just sort of lifted it [*New Age*] and gave the people a break of reading this heavy stuff.¹⁰⁹

Records held by the Audit Bureau of Circulation of South Africa indicate that *New Age* sales for the first half of 1958 were 18 844, and 21 509 for the second half. They dropped to 13 407 during the first half of 1959, but rose to 18 075 in the second half of that year. Unfortunately, no figures for 1960 were available.¹¹⁰ The comic-strip *did* coincide with a rise in registered sales. Its actual sales – which relied heavily on ‘sellers on street corners and lots of volunteers [who] would take it door to door’ – were higher and increased further during national campaigns such as the Defiance Campaign. At these times sales could be twice or three times the audited 1958 figures.¹¹¹

The comic represented a significant departure in *New Age*'s depiction of the liberation struggle. According to Albie Sachs,

...it was daring to use cartoons. This was a serious political struggle with a solemnity about it....the idea that you could have a little skelm jumping over fences and so on, that took some courage, that was a breakthrough....Alex got enormous pleasure out of it. He would chortle and chuckle, and we would all get together and imagine it....but it was very much his thing....¹¹²

While there were no published criticisms about the presence of a *comic* in *New Age*, the joint authors of one letter described *Little Libby* as ‘exceptionally interesting right up to the time he wins his fight with the farmer [episodes one to five]. One could follow a definite trend. But as he comes to the big city...[episodes six onwards] one is at a complete loss’. They complained that from there on the story seemed to ‘lack humour and punch. Surely’, they argued, ‘there must be some trend in the story which should hold one’s interest.’ They suggested that La Guma ‘should consider improving it’.¹¹³ They may have had a point. The first five episodes appear to conform more readily to the conventions of successful comic narrative formula, with the resolution of a small crisis midway followed by a concluding ‘cliff-hanger’ that creates suspense for the next episode. Pre-publicity in *New Age* for the strip

showed two characters, Sgt Shark, who would only appear in episode 16, and Frik[k]adel, the Afrikaans word for a rissole and possibly a local version of Popeye's friend Wimpy, who never appeared at all. At a time when La Guma's prose fiction was in a state of transition from journalism and short stories to the longer novella *A Walk in the Night* and its successors, the problems that *Little Libby's* critics detected suggest that at this stage La Guma had a greater capacity for characterisation and diverse techniques of representation than for narrative strategy and sustained plots.

There is no suggestion here that in *Little Libby* La Guma consciously set out to produce a 'graphic novel', but that as his first published work of extended fiction and his only one in a popular genre in which very few South African writers have ever worked, *Little Libby* has an important place in the history of South African popular culture and in the study of La Guma's work. By design or default La Guma's first attempt at sustained narrative, which is also his only major surviving work of popular culture, provided him with the space to experiment with the relationships between historical and narrative time, plot and characterisation, and with various authorial voices and narrative perspectives. Simultaneously, the traffic in images and representations between his pieces on Johannesburg during the Treason Trial, the comic-strip and the subsequent 'Up My Alley' column' suggests that La Guma's political and aesthetic world view could shift from the serious to the quirky and the anti-authoritarian, sometimes by simply representing the same situation in different media. La Guma drew on recent and contemporary events and characters, and exploited the available conventions of cartoon and cinematic narrative and representation. Politically and graphically, therefore, *Little Libby* was very much a product of its time.

That 'time' was dominated by the Treason Trial which, of course, moved him from the relatively sedate pace of Cape Town to the fast, modern cityscape of Johannesburg with its skyscrapers and the fascist monumental architecture of Pretoria's Voortrekker Monument. These rapid shifts did not 'urbanise' him – La Guma had little affinity for rural life – but the comic strip clearly shows that he drew on the conventions of the cinema – a modern medium – to express the 'shock' of the

new environment in which he found himself. With its examples of speeding cars, compressed images of skyscrapers, long shots of city streets and close-ups of specific objects we can see the links between cinematic techniques and *Little Libby*.¹¹⁴

While some of the narrative and representational strategies that La Guma used in *Little Libby* could substantiate the argument for continuity between La Guma's journalism and fiction, this analysis of the comic also suggests that at a relatively early stage in his writing career La Guma experimented with a variety of representational media and genres, and that if he consciously chose specific narrative strategies for his first extended piece of fiction then there were several that he did not or could not readily transfer to his longer prose fiction. Where there are correspondences and continuities between his comic and the novels that followed *A Walk in the Night*, these seem to have taken the form of references to – rather than use of – popular cultural genres such as films, cartoons and other comics; his own journalism; formulae governing the relationship between 'stock' and 'individual' characters. The comic's links with and differences from his other works mean that it cannot be dismissed as an intriguing detour from La Guma's self-proclaimed steady progress along a route marked by the classic works of nineteenth- and twentieth-century realism, naturalism, modernism and progressive political engagement. The genres to which La Guma refers did influence him and other South African writers, but this should not blind us to another La Guma of popular culture, slapstick humour and the playful subversion of narrative and representational convention.

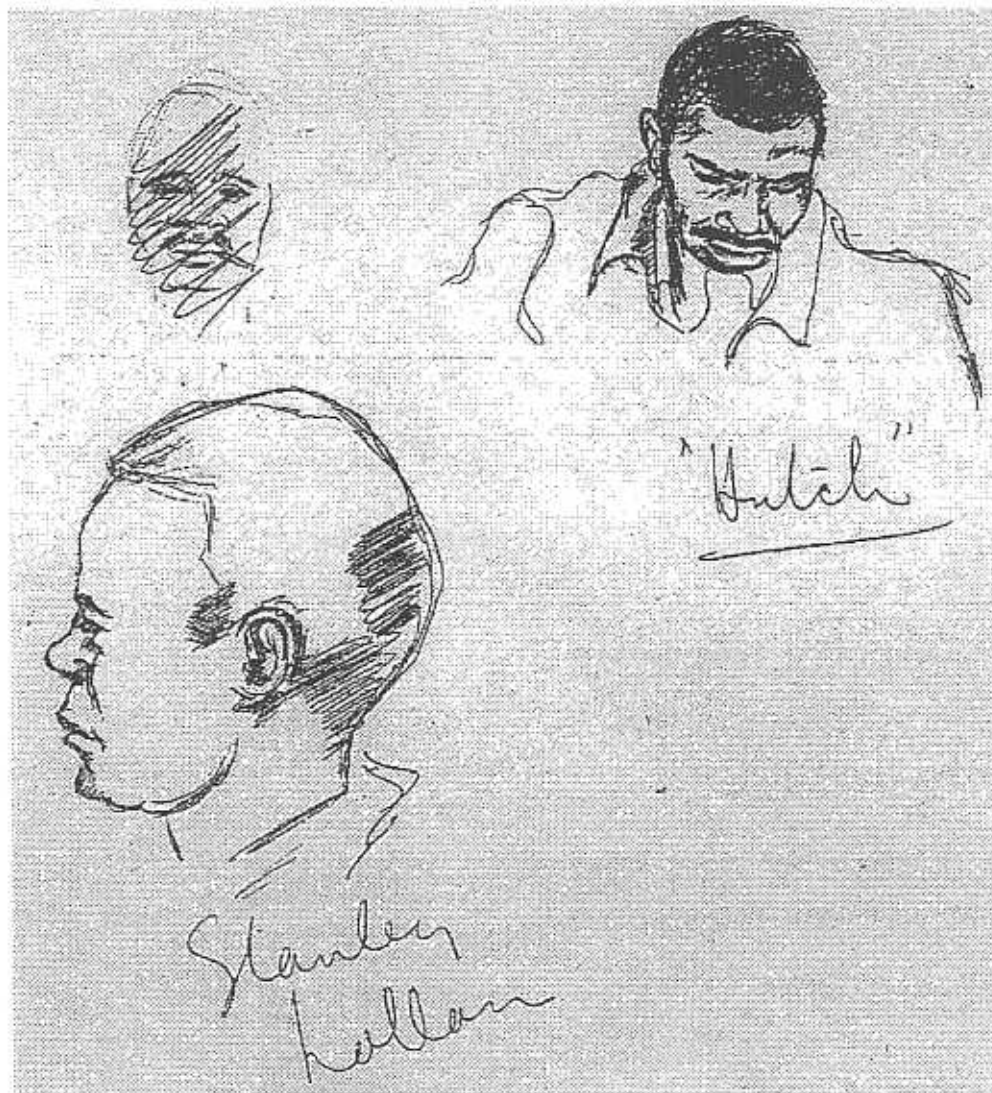


Fig 4.1: Stanley Lollan and Alfred Hutchinson (Source: Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection)

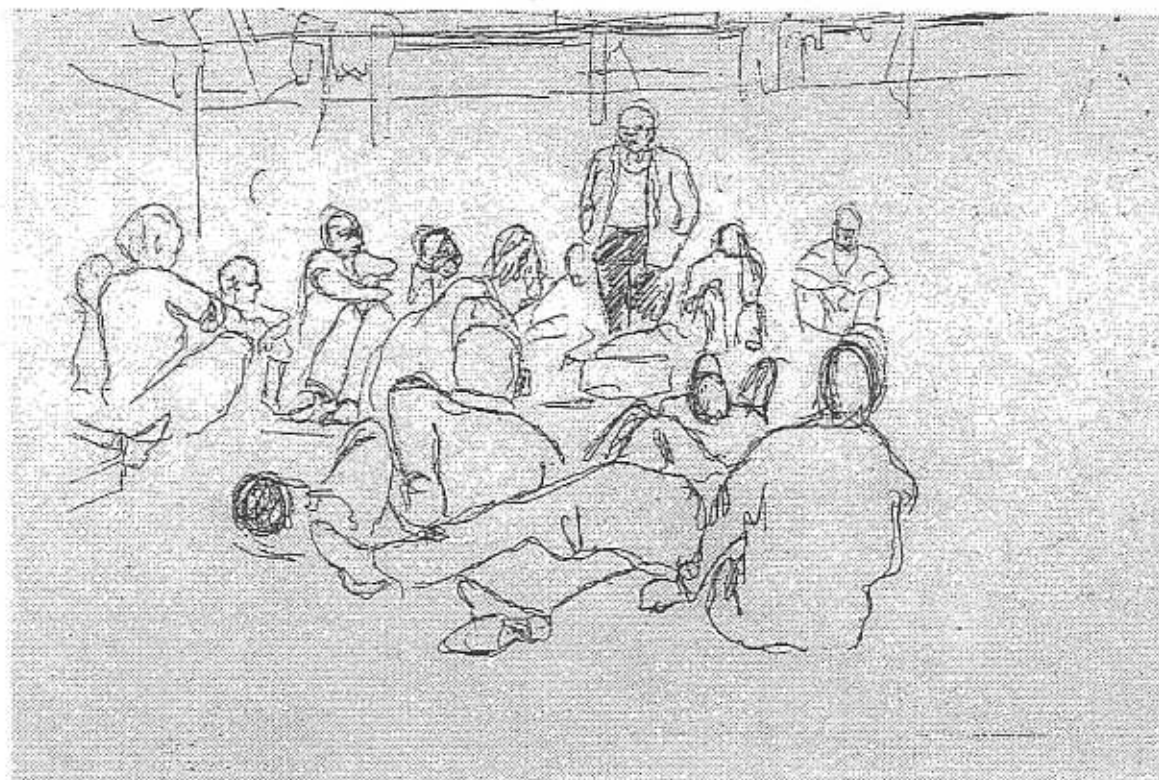


Fig. 4.2: Joint sessions (Source: Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection)



Fig. 4.3: Prof Matthews and Chief Luthuli (Source: Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection)

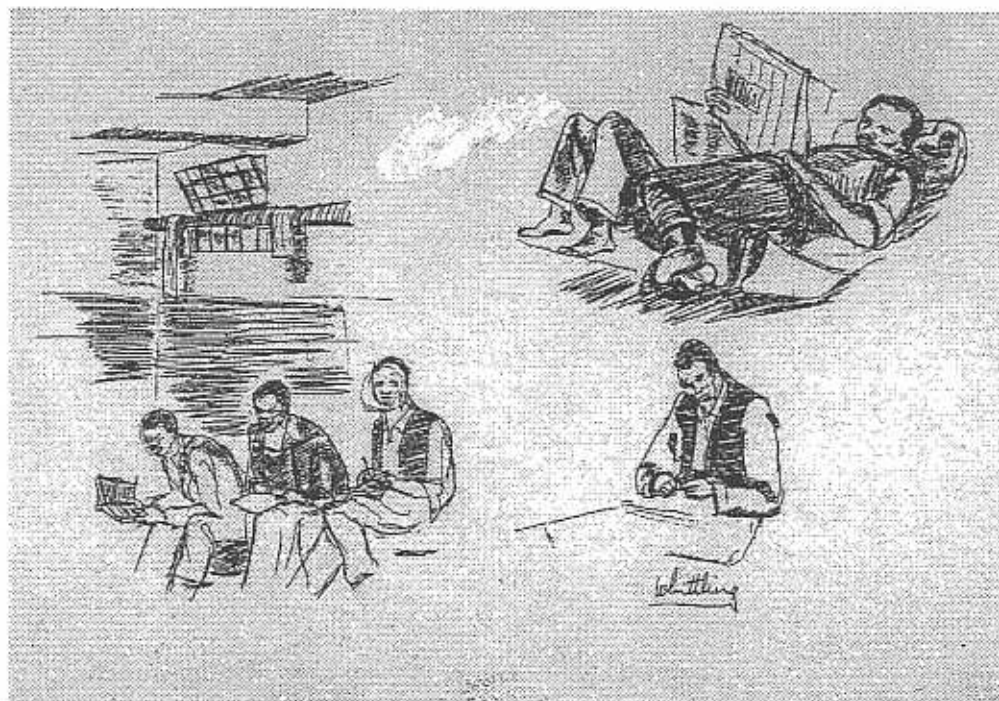


Fig. 4.4: Prisoners reading newspapers; whittling (Source: Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection)

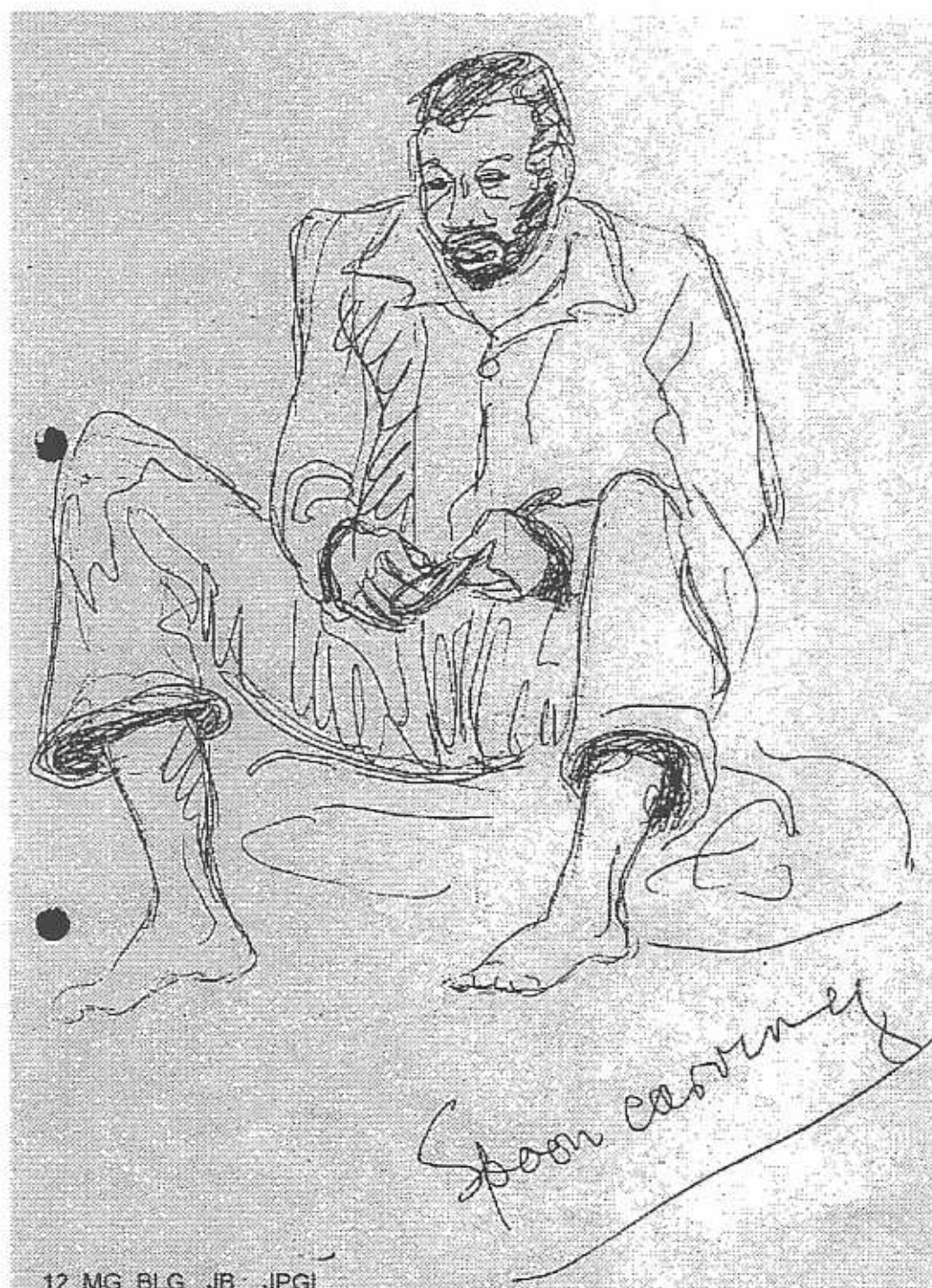


Fig 4.5: Spoon carving (Source: Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection)



Fig 4.6: Chess (Source: Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection)

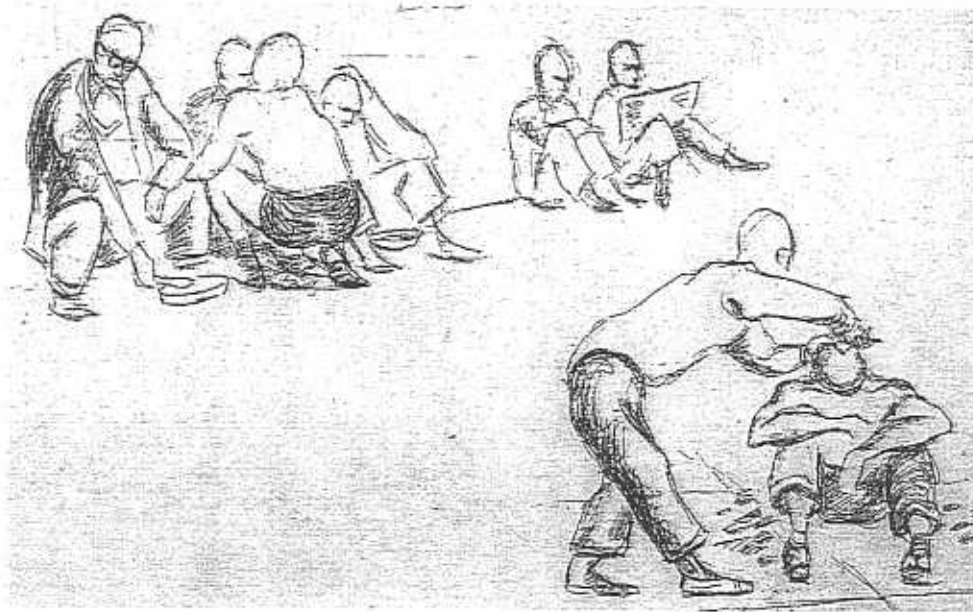


Fig. 4.7: Enduring prison haircuts (Source: Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection)



Fig. 4.8: Moses Kotane and Nelson Mandela (Source: Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection)

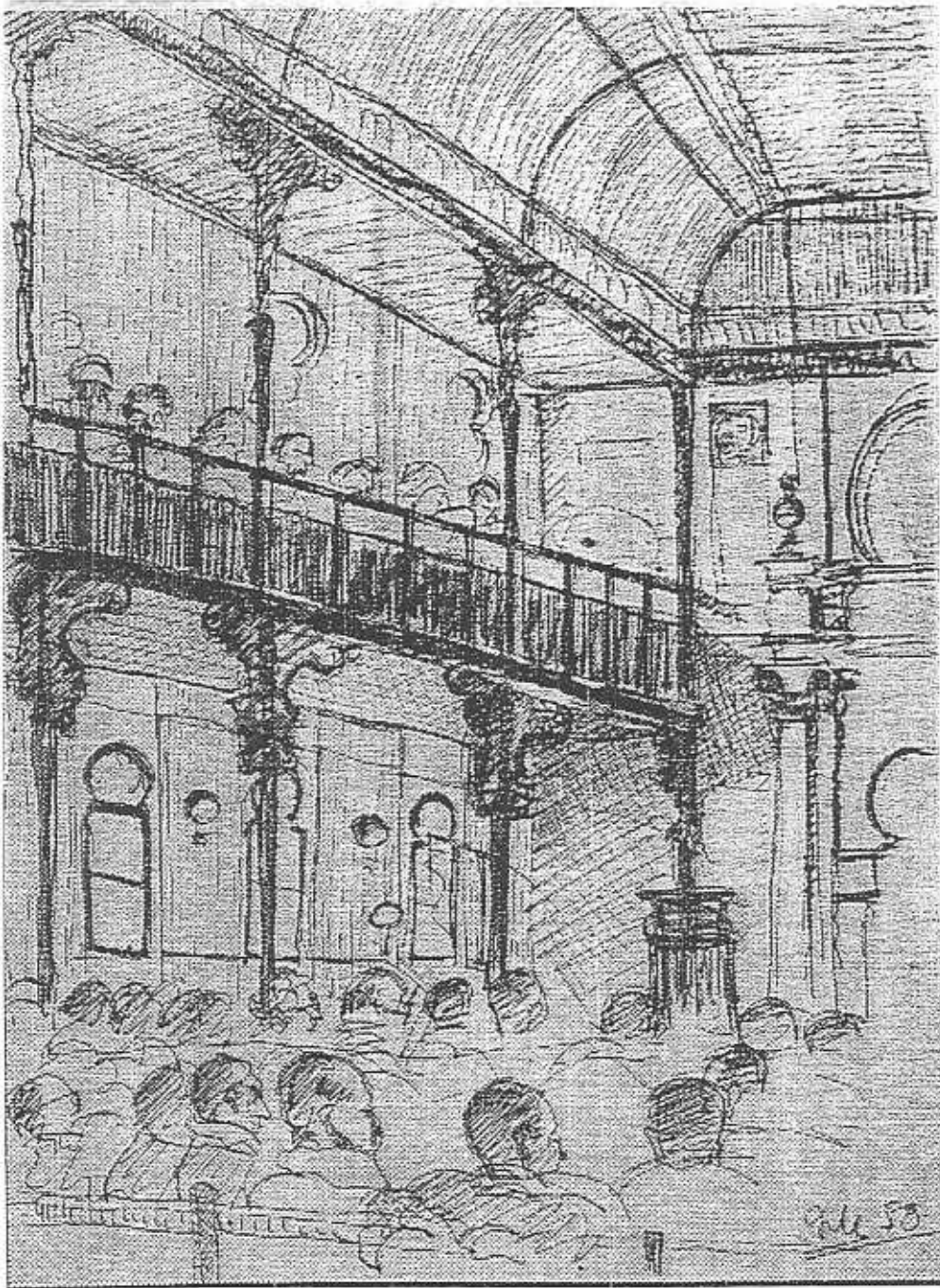


Fig. 4.9: Ike Horvitch's sketch of the Old Synagogue, Pretoria (Source: *New Age* 27 August 1958)

LITTLE LIBBY — THE ADVENTURES of LIBERATION CHABALALA

by Alex ha Guma

Little Libby is being entertained in a shebeen.

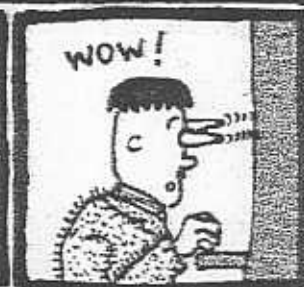


Fig. 4.11 (Source: New Age 2 July 1959)



Fig. 4.12 (Source: New Age 16 April 1959)

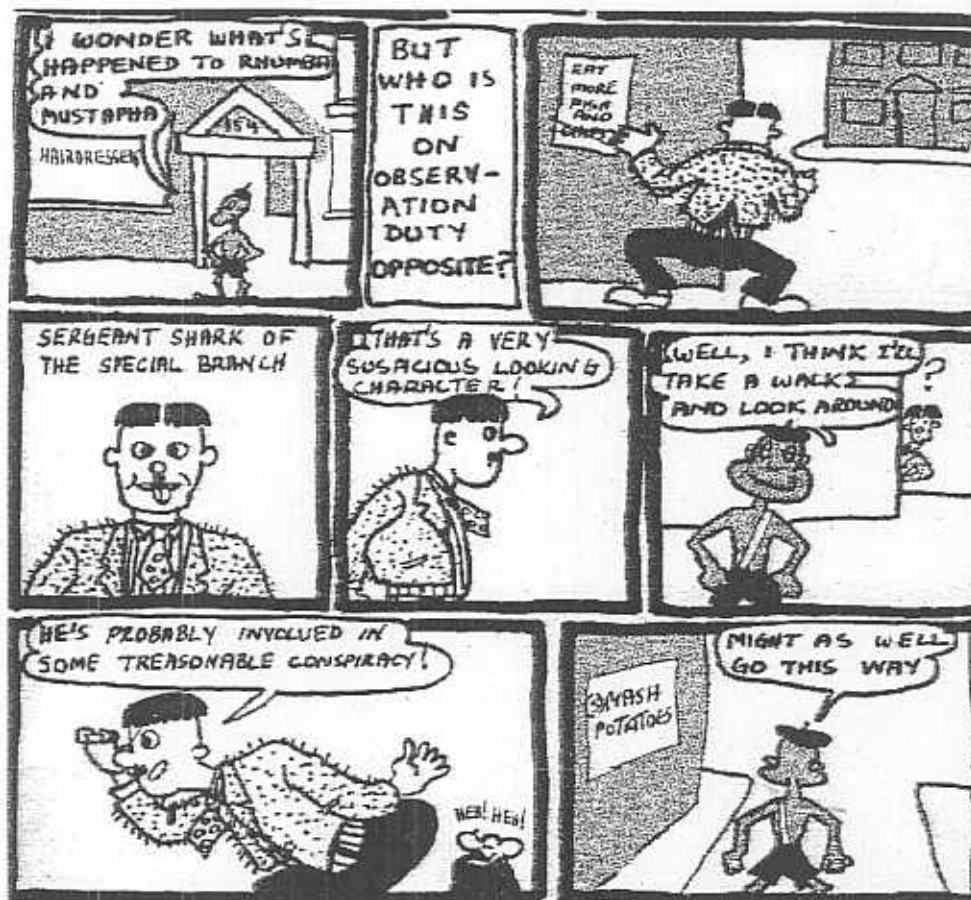


Fig 4.14 (Source: *New Age* 18 June 1959)



Fig. 4.15 (Source: *New Age* 19 March 1959)



Fig. 4.16 (Source: New Age 25 June 1959)

LITTLE LIBBY - THE ADVENTURES OF LIBERATION CHAGALALA

by Alex ha Guma

Libby and his friends have escaped from the clutches of the police and got together again.



Fig 4.17 (Source: New Age 6 August 1959)

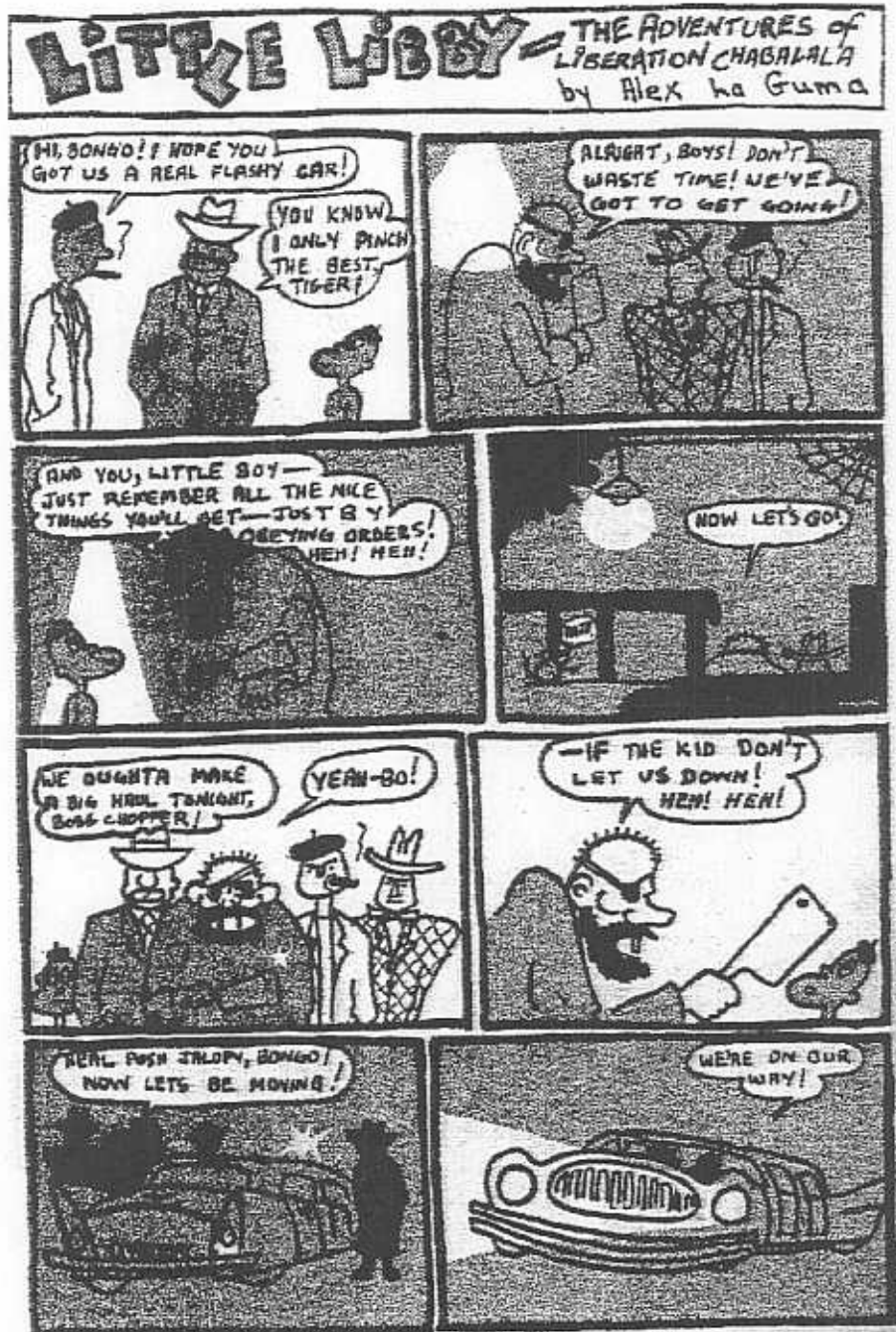


Fig 4.18 (Source: New Age 1 October 1959)

Endnotes

- ¹ La Guma, 'Uncle Sam', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 171.
- ² *South African Political Materials*, 2:DS/2:30/4; emphasis in original.
- ³ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.
- ⁴ *South African Political Materials*, 2:DS2:30/4; SACPO First Annual Conference, p. 7.
- ⁵ Ballinger, *From Union to Apartheid*, pp. 399, 401; Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History*, p. 365.
- ⁶ *Regina vs. Adams and Others*, p. 142 (original transcription).
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 164.
- ⁸ *South African Political Materials*, 2:DS/1:84/2 'SACPO and the Elections'; *New Age*, 13 March 1958
- ⁹ *The Guardian*, 8 January 1948; Ballinger, *From Union to Apartheid*, pp. 391-396.
- ¹⁰ F. Carneson, "'The Franchise Action Committee' – Discussion 1, 3 June 1951', in A. Drew (ed.) *South Africa's Radical Tradition* Vol. 2, pp. 103-106.
- ¹¹ *New Age*, 25 April 1957; G. Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, pp. 269-270.
- ¹² W. Sisulu, 'Boycott as a Political Weapon', in A. Drew (ed.), *South Africa's Radical Tradition* Vol. 2, pp. 188-191.
- ¹³ *New Age*, 14 November 1957.
- ¹⁴ *New Age*, 19 December 1957; I am grateful to Dr Jabulani Mkhize for pointing out this article to me.
- ¹⁵ *New Age*, 24 and 31 October, 14 November 1957.
- ¹⁶ *New Age*, 5 and 12 December 1957.
- ¹⁷ *New Age*, 19 December 1957, 26 December 1957.
- ¹⁸ SACPO 1st Annual National Conference, *South African Political Materials* 2:DS2/1:30/4.
- ¹⁹ *New Age*, 26 December 1957.
- ²⁰ B. Desai, in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 124.
- ²¹ J. Gomas, quoted in D. Musson, *Johnny Gomas: Voice of the Working Class* (Buchu Books, Cape Town, 1989), p. 119; emphasis in original.
- ²² *New Age*, 23 January 1958.
- ²³ *New Age*, 20 March 1958; Blanche la Guma/Roger Field interviews.
- ²⁴ *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 158.
- ²⁵ Albie Sachs, interview 11 December 2000.
- ²⁶ *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 158.
- ²⁷ *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 181.
- ²⁸ Albie Sachs interview 11 December 2000.
- ²⁹ G. Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, pp. 206, 212-213.
- ³⁰ *New Age*, 10 April 1958.
- ³¹ T. Karis and G.M. Carter (eds), *From Protest to Challenge* Vol. III, p. 285.
- ³² *South African Political Materials*, 2:DS2/1:92/15.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, (original spelling, punctuation and emphasis).
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*; V.I. Lenin, *Disruption of Unity Under Cries of Unity*, in *Selected Works* Vol. I (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977) pp. 548-566.
- ³⁵ *Treason Trial Defence Fund Press Summary* No. 12, August 1959.
- ³⁶ *Regina vs Farid Adams and Others*, Special Criminal Court, Pretoria, 29 March 1961.
- ³⁷ *Treason Trial Defence Fund Press Summary* No. 12, August 1959.
- ³⁸ E. Roux, *Time Longer Than Rope* (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1972), p. 400.
- ³⁹ B. la Guma, 'A Wife's Memory', in C. Abrahams (ed.), *Memories of Home*, p. 9.
- ⁴⁰ B. la Guma, 'A Wife's Memory' p. 9; 'Treason Trial 1956-61', in Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection, Mayibuye Centre Archives.

- ⁴¹ Blanche la Guma/Roger Field interviews.
- ⁴² My thanks to Jeremy Cronin whose poem, 'A Naming of Matches', in his anthology *Inside* (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1983), p. 95, enabled me to establish the political source – Mao Zedong – of the poem.
- ⁴³ *Regina vs Adams and Others* Vol.2 (Pretoria, Government Printers: 1958); *Treason Trial Defence Fund Press Summary* No. 18, 28 September-14 October 1959, p. 5.
- ⁴⁴ A. la Guma, '156 Families to Feed', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 29-30.
- ⁴⁵ B. la Guma, 'A Wife's Memory', p. 10.
- ⁴⁶ *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 36; E. Hemingway *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (Jonathon Cape: London, 1955).
- ⁴⁷ La Guma, *A Soviet Journey; Time of the Butcherbird* (Heinemann, London, 1979).
- ⁴⁸ La Guma, in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 29, 33 & 38.
- ⁴⁹ *New Age*, 15 May 1958.
- ⁵⁰ La Guma, 'Time to Think', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 42-46.
- ⁵¹ *New Age*, 7 August 1958.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 2 October 1958.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 16 October 1958.
- ⁵⁴ *Government Gazette* Vol. 94 (Pretoria, Government Printers, 1958), pp. 48-49; *Treason Trial Defence Fund Press Summary* No. 5, December 1958.
- ⁵⁵ *Treason Trial Defence Fund Press Summary* No. 11 April 1959.
- ⁵⁶ *New Age*, 23 April 1959.
- ⁵⁷ La Guma, 'Ah, Dis Die Economic Boycott', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 130-131.
- ⁵⁸ La Guma, 'Brickbats and Bouquets', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 149.
- ⁵⁹ *Treason Trial Defence Fund Press Summary* No. 12 August 1959.
- ⁶⁰ *Rex vs Adams and Others* Vol. II, p. 171; punctuation in original.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 171; punctuation in original.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 172.
- ⁶³ 'Lionel Forman', in Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection, Mayibuye Centre Archives; La Guma, 'Court Cameos', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 39.
- ⁶⁴ *New Age*, 21 January 1960.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 26 June 1960; *Treason Trial Defence Fund Press Summary* Nos 36, 37.
- ⁶⁶ *Treason Trial Defence Fund Press Summary* No. 49; *Regina vs Farid Adams and Others*, Special Criminal Court, Pretoria. 29 March 1961.
- ⁶⁷ 'Shots Fired at *New Age* Reporter', *New Age*, 15 May 1958; 'Government Terrorists', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 159-160.
- ⁶⁸ 'A message to our readers from the Fort', *New Age*, 13 December 1956.
- ⁶⁹ 'Stop The War In Egypt!' pamphlet - Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection, Mayibuye Centre, UWC.
- ⁷⁰ A. Hutchinson, 'It Could Never be in Vain' *Sechaba Special Festac '77 Issue* p. 5.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁷² Fig 15 *New Age*, 3 January 1957; Fig 16 *New Age*, 24 January 1957; Fig 17 *New Age*, 21 February 1957; Fig 18, *New Age* 27 August 1958.
- ⁷³ This section draws on two other pieces that I have written on the comic: 'Art and the Man: La Guma's Comics and Paintings' *Critical Survey* 11: 2 (1999) and 'La Guma's Little Libby: The Adventures of Liberation Chabalala', in S. Newell (ed.), *Readings in African Popular Culture* (James Currey, London, 2001).
- ⁷⁴ My thanks to the Storyteller Group <storyteller@icon.co.za> for pointing out this comic serial.
- ⁷⁵ For Gorky see B. Chandramohan, *A Study in Trans-Ethnicity in Modern South Africa: The Writings of Alex la Guma 1925-1985* and J. Mkhize, 'Social Realism in Alex la Guma's Longer Fiction'; for Dostoyevsky see L. Nkosi, 'Fiction by Black South Africans: Richard Rive; Bloke Modisane; Ezekiel Mphahlele; Alex la Guma', in U. Beier (ed.), *Introduction to African Literature: An anthology of critical writing* (Longman, London, 1979), p. 227; for American

Naturalism see J.M. Coetzee, 'Man's Fate in the Novels of Alex la Guma', in *Doubling the Point: J.M. Coetzee Essays and Interviews* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass., 1992), p. 345.

⁷⁶ W. Soyinka, 'The Fight for Human Existence', *Post* (Johannesburg), 3 June 1962; W. Carpenter, "'Ovals, Spheres, Ellipses and Sundry Bulges": Alex La Guma Imagines the Human Body', *Research in African Literature* No. 22, Vol. 4, 1992, p. 80; B. Chandramohan, *A Study in Trans-Ethnicity in Modern South Africa*, p. 20; S. Whitman, 'A Story of Resistance', *The African Communist* No. 77, 1979, p. 113.

⁷⁷ C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, pp. 3, 7-8.

⁷⁸ Interview Blanche la Guma/Roger Field 17 April 1998.

⁷⁹ Correspondence George Herman/Roger Field 19 February 1997; interview Dr Irwin Combrinck 5 February 1997; Blanche la Guma/Roger Field interviews; C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. ix.

⁸⁰ G. Cornwell, 'Protest in Fiction: an approach to Alex la Guma', pp. 45-46.

⁸¹ B. Chandramohan, *A Study in Trans-Ethnicity in Modern South Africa*, pp. 20, 120, 173-176.

⁸² Albie Sachs, interview 11 December 2000.

⁸³ B. Chandramohan, *A Study in Trans-Ethnicity in Modern South Africa*, p. 174.

⁸⁴ La Guma, in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 51; *Liberation Chabalala* contains the complete *Little Libby* (pp. 61-98); all references to the comic-strip are from this book; Figures 19-26 refer to pp. 67, 79, 68, 88, 77, 63, 78, 90.

⁸⁵ *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 59-60; *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 58.

⁸⁶ *New Age*, 22 January 1959, 23 April 1959, 12 June 1959.

⁸⁷ *New Age*, 24 October 1957.

⁸⁸ *New Age*, 24 January 1957.

⁸⁹ *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. xxxiii.

⁹⁰ *New Age*, 13 December 1956.

⁹¹ *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 213; for a fuller treatment of La Guma's Pampoen-onder-die-Bos pieces see J. Mkhize, 'Social Realism in Alex la Guma's Longer Fiction'.

⁹² T. Lodge, *Black politics in South Africa since 1945*, pp. 193-195.

⁹³ K. Luckhardt and B. Wall, *Organize or Starve! The History of the South African Congress of Trade Unions* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1980), pp. 341-344.

⁹⁴ A. Hutchinson, 'It Could Never be in Vain' *Sechaba Special Festac '77 Issue* p. 4.

⁹⁵ M. Harmel, "'Die Burger" is Right...Boycott IS a Two-Edged Sword' and R. Segal, 'The Power of the Pound', in *Fighting Talk*, May 1959 pp. 3-4.

⁹⁶ P. McDonnell et al, *Krazy Kat: The Comic Art of George Herriman* (Harry Abrams, New York, 1986); W. Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art* (Poorhouse Press, Tamarac, 1985), p. 8; E. Shannon, "'That we may mis-unda-stend each udda": The Rhetoric of *Krazy Kat*', *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 29, No 2, 1995.

⁹⁷ La Guma, 'Ten Days in Roeland Street Jail', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 16.

⁹⁸ La Guma, *The Stone Country*, p. 127.

⁹⁹ W. Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art*, p. 148.

¹⁰⁰ B. Blackbeard and M. Williams (eds), *The Smithsonian Collection of Newspaper Comics* (Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington D.C., 1977), pp. 132 and 53-54.

¹⁰¹ R. Castledon, *World History* (Parragon, London, 1994), p. 574.

¹⁰² La Guma, 'American Way Of Life', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 171.

¹⁰³ La Guma, in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 67-70; A. Odendaal and R. Field (eds), *Liberation Chabalala: The World of Alex la Guma*, p. xxi; *New Age*, 13 November 1947 & 4 September 1958.

¹⁰⁴ J. Opland (ed.), *Words that Circle Words: A Choice of South African Oral Poetry* (A.D.

Donker, Johannesburg, 1992), p. 102. The full text of the *moppie* is: 'Ma, where's Pa?/Pa's behind the hotel./What's Pa doing?/Pa's got a bottle./Come dance with me the skimellha./The skimellha, the rhumba./Come dance with me the skimellha./The skimellha, the rhumba.' See also C.

Winburg, 'Satire, Slavery and the "Ghoemaliedjies" of the Cape Muslims', *New Contrast* Vol. 19 No. 4 1991.

¹⁰⁵ Interview Alf Wannenburg/Roger Field 25 May 1998; D. Brutus, 'African Thought: A Tribute to Alex la Guma', in C. Abrahams (ed.), *Memories of Home: The Writings of Alex La Guma*, p. 4;

D. Biggs, *The 1999 South African Plonk Buyer's Guide* (Ampersand Press, Cape Town, 1999) p. 50.

¹⁰⁶ An example of this might be 'Previously on *Twin Peaks*...':

¹⁰⁷ Lodge, *Black politics in South Africa since 1945*, p. 194.

¹⁰⁸ *New Age* 26 November 1959.

¹⁰⁹ B. la Guma/B. Chandramohan interview, in B. Chandramohan, *A Study in Trans-Ethnicity in Modern South Africa*, p. 205.

¹¹⁰ Audit Bureau of Circulation of South Africa, 'Certificates of Average Nett Sales' 1958, 1959 (Johannesburg).

¹¹¹ B. Bunting, 'Tribute to a fighter for democracy' *Cape Times*, 10 February 1999; Albie Sachs, interview, 11 December 2000.

¹¹² Albie Sachs, interview 11 December 2000.

¹¹³ *New Age* 11 June 1959; F. Barker, *Comics: ideology, power and the critics* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1989), p. 37.

¹¹⁴ P. Wollen, *Raiding the Icebox: Reflections on Twentieth-Century Culture* (Verso, London, 1993), p. 50.

Chapter Five

The muttering remained

Between late 1957 and 1962 La Guma's short stories deal with perceptions of race and social mobility. There is some divergence between his political, journalistic and literary interpretations of the ways in which coloured identity could be experienced and lived. His journalism and short stories also show traces and hints of issues that would soon appear in his longer fiction. This period saw the banning of the African National Congress and the Pan-Africanist Congress, the Sharpeville and Langa massacres, and the Coloured National Convention in Malmesbury outside Cape Town. La Guma was detained without trial, banned and placed under house arrest.

A slave has revolted

During the early years of the Treason Trial and SACPO's election campaign, La Guma published only two short stories – 'Out of Darkness' and 'Battle for Honour'. For the former he received a welcome £10 from *Africa South* editor Ronald Segal. La Guma was on the road to becoming a full-time, though not necessarily well-paid, writer.¹ 'Out of Darkness' focuses on racial and political consciousness among the necessarily male and coloured inmates of a cell. Both the earlier 'Etude' and 'Out of Darkness' created the impression that contact between the coloured lumpenproletariat and middle class was fortuitous. They also suggested that the latter's access to the dominant European metropolitan culture, whether through leaving the country or passing for white, might offer an escape from poverty but left South Africa's problems unresolved. 'The solution,' he wrote in an article on coloured emigration, would emerge when coloureds realised that 'South Africa belongs to them as much as it does to all other sections of the people, and that the future... is assured by the ultimate success of the struggle for liberation of all the non-white people of this their homeland'.² However, this abstract affirmation of the unity of all those who experienced national oppression left unanswered the question

of how specific national groups might experience their identity and oppression. We will now see how he dealt with this problem in his early short stories.

In 'Out of Darkness' La Guma's narrator delineates the characters, describes the hierarchy of the cell's inmates and tells the story-within-the story of Ou Kakkelak in whom he recognises something of himself. Ou Kakkelak can recognise and acknowledge the effects of environment on individual and group behaviour. He is 'an educated man' who asks the narrator whether he knows that 'the whole of mankind's history consists of a series of revolutions'.³ Ou Kakkelak's fluctuations between lucidity and regression facilitate the unfolding of the story's main concerns: coloured race consciousness and racism, emotional rejection, and how prison conditions under apartheid precipitate degeneration, deviance and deals with the oppressor.

In 'Etude' the only character whose skin colour and features receive the narrator's attention is the convent-educated piano player: 'Her face was dark and fine and delicate as a costly violin.'⁴ In that story colour consciousness of the woman only combines with intimations of Damon Runyon's style in *Guys and Dolls*. This combination of humorous morality tale and the conventional masculinity of the underclass 'guys' of District Six would later develop into a much stronger critique of coloured antipathy towards 'African-ness' in 'The Gladiators'.⁵ While Ou Kakkelak's skin 'was as dark as burnt leather, and he had slightly negroid features and kinky hair' his fiancée Cora was "'almost white'" and "'could pass as white"'. She "'met white people who thought she really was white"'. She rejected him because she feared their continued association would deny her what she regarded as a better life. 'Out of Darkness' contrasts Ou Kakkelak's emotional commitment with Cora's inconstancy, his respectability as a teacher and his concern with self-improvement with Cora's enjoyment of superficial "'white places"' such as "'bioscopes, cafes...parties and dances"', though we should not read this as a wholesale condemnation of these forms of enjoyment, for in 'Identical Books' they are central to his description of coloured youth culture. From a position on the margins of the margin, of life between coloured and white, Cora has been 'accepted'

as white. She rejects Ou Kakkalak as ““a black nigger”” and so represses and compounds her fear of the ‘darkness’ from which she wishes to escape. After this, old Cockroach accidentally kills a friend who criticises him for ‘going off over a damn, play-white bitch’⁶

La Guma was clearly critical of apartheid legislation such as the Population Registration Act, but he was equally critical of people like Cora who accepted and exploited the racial hierarchy that it sought to establish. The problem for La Guma was not being coloured or whether coloureds existed. As his response to Peake suggests, the problem was how to disentangle coloured identity from colour prejudice and apartheid legislation. In La Guma’s view coloureds who sought upward mobility and a new life by denying that they were coloured were undermining the political views in which he believed so strongly. Like his father, La Guma was critical of those who still experienced what his father had earlier described as ‘THAT INFERIORITY COMPLEX’, and like his father he saw no contradiction between asserting a coloured identity, belief in Marxism and opposition to apartheid.

Where the relationship between ‘Etude’ and ‘Non-European Audience Hears Emlyn Williams’ suggests that La Guma’s fiction influenced his journalism, the reverse is true of the links between his articles on prison conditions and ‘Out of Darkness’. These links suggest that in the context of prison narratives he continued to see connections between environmental factors, enforced deviations from a perceived heterosexual norm, and the relative absence of politically motivated opposition. This short story shares with the preceding prison articles a repetition of phrases such as ‘cement yard’, ‘concrete wall’, ‘stone staircase’, ‘stone cavern’, ‘stone ceiling’.⁷ The prison is clearly a ‘stone country’ – the title of his third novel – and the direct opposite of those private, domestic and feminine interiors where progressive ideas could be nurtured and the vision of a better world could be entertained.⁸ Political comment on prison conditions in the story within the story requires that its main protagonists, Ou Kakkalak and the participant narrator, display a conventional heterosexuality. La Guma achieves this through two manoeuvres.

Firstly, he replaces the references to sex and atavistic behaviour, which are present in his journalism, with symbolic acts such as the ape-man's defiant spitting at the cell door:

Smiley Abrahams...hawked and spat straight onto the door and wiped his mouth on the back of his hand....

‘Just a warning.’ Old Cockroach smiled. ‘No, not meant for those “corpies”.

He can't afford to be hardcase with them. That was meant for us all. The ape must make it known that he is still king of the jungle, even if the elephant is bigger than he is.’⁹

Secondly, La Guma pathologises homosexuality. Like Hemingway, he sees it as a “sexual tragedy” [that] symbolises a general breakdown of social order and cultural values’.¹⁰ I shall use the psychoanalytic concepts of ‘transposition’ and ‘displacement’ to help trace the story of this ‘breakdown’ in La Guma’s prison texts. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud describes transposition as ‘the replacement of the genitals by the face in the symbolism of unconscious thinking’, while displacement may become manifest through a ‘change in the verbal expression of the thoughts concerned...along a chain of associations’.¹¹ La Guma’s journalism during this period contains references to homosexual sex and animal-like behaviour. In part the latter function as images of homosexuality.¹² By contrast his fiction contains only metaphors. In ‘Out of Darkness’ the cell boss spits at the door. ‘Tattoo Marks and Nails’, which the next chapter will cover in more detail, marks a further stage in the process of transposition and displacement. There La Guma replaces spit with sweat and water as he weaves together descriptions of sweaty bodies, the conflict over water in the cell, and Ahmed the Turk’s story-within-the-story about the prisoner of war who cheated his fellow prisoners out of their water rations.¹³ From the ‘Dead-End Kids’ pieces to at least as far as his third novel, *The Stone Country*, this chain of associations enabled La Guma to suppress the

symptoms of prison sex, but not prison sex itself and the threat which it seemed to pose to conventional working-class and middle-class life.¹⁴

Read together, La Guma's writing on the coons and on the sexuality of long-term prisoners, both mediated through the Dead-End Kids, indicate an interesting though not unusual contradiction. On the one hand, his views on coons and rock 'n' roll suggest that cultural improvement is possible if living conditions improve. Here he subscribes to what Young describes as Enlightenment notions of civilisation: 'fundamentally a comparative concept that took on its meaning as the end-point in an historical view of the advancement of humanity'. This was entirely compatible with the tenets of historical materialism of his 1947 letter when he argued that '[m]ankind has developed from a state of barbarism to its present level. It must advance further towards the highest form of society.' Simultaneously, however, La Guma subscribed to what Young also calls the 'doctrine of degeneration that held that the "primitive" stages were relapses rather than an early stage of development'.¹⁵ In the discourse of nineteenth-century anthropology, La Guma's work indicates that on some issues he was a cultural evolutionist, a progressivist and monogenist, i.e. he believed that there was one human race. On other matters he was a degenerationist who came close to polygenism in his view that 'dead-end kids' and homosexual convicts were almost a race apart.

La Guma's literary portraits during the Treason Trial display other disparities. The two most extensive descriptions of trialists, Ben Turok and Wilton Mkwayi, suggest that he integrated whites and Africans into his vision of the 'New South Africa' through different though complementary forms of representation. He describes Turok as 'cheery', with a 'genial disposition, [and] an easy jocularit[y]'. These are personal characteristics that he shares with several other trialists on this occasion.¹⁶ La Guma also linked his portrait of Turok to one of his other concerns at the time – the 1958 elections. Turok was 'not in agreement with the undemocratic nature of this sort of representation, but the Africans [had] nominated him and he [would] go to Council to champion the Freedom Charter and the cause of liberation and equality for all – Europeans, Coloureds, Africans and Indians'.¹⁷ Turok had

'played an active part in student political life and... in the work of the Modern Youth Society' after the Communist Party and its Youth League had been banned. He had been an organiser for the SA Congress of Democrats (COD) and 'had introduced the clause of the Freedom Charter, "The People Shall Share the Country's Wealth"'. After the Congress of the People he had become a trade-union organiser, and "Comrade Benny" had gained the faith and confidence of all the workers, Coloured and African, with whom he was associated'. Most significantly, like Lionel Forman, Turok had 'succeeded in adopting the world outlook of the working man' and had overcome the racial and class prejudices normally associated with white professionals in South Africa.¹⁸

The piece on Wilton Mkwayi, 'Ncincilili! In Praise of Wilton Mkwayi', is concerned with forced removals, class struggle and popular resistance to the Bantu Authorities Act.¹⁹ These are all part of the experience rather than the 'outlook' of the South African 'working man'. From a stylistic point of view the essay is radically different. Here La Guma tries to reproduce the style of the Xhosa *imbongi* ('praise-poet') and to communicate a sense of 'African-ness' through a self-consciously simple, quasi-biblical style that he would later deploy more extensively in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, his first novel published in exile.²⁰ This representation of 'African-ness' through phrasing and sentence structure suggests a longing for the idea of an (irretrievable) organic community that has much in common with his earlier review of the Emyln Williams performance. It also shares features with 'City of Gold', his article on Johannesburg's transformation from 'rolling land' to 'stony façade', written around the same time.²¹ Nostalgia for a destroyed rural community is also present in the works of Steinbeck, *de rigueur* reading for La Guma and his circle during the late forties, and in Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*. The latter displays stylistic devices which are not dissimilar to 'Ncincilili', and which also chronicled African experience of apartheid and enforced urbanisation. For J.M. Coetzee, Paton's novel uses specific syntactic and stylistic devices to represent a 'Zuluness' that implies a whole language community's access to 'a bygone and heroic age'. It also carries the assumption that the Zulu language itself is 'as

inhospitable to lies and deception as it is to complexity and abstraction.’ There is no indication that La Guma invested Mkwazi with these characteristics, but there is sufficient similarity to argue that at times La Guma’s nostalgic representations of race through culture and history came close to negating his own political goals.²²

If this seems an unpalatable aspect of La Guma’s representation of race, class and gender, part of the reason may lie in the frustrations that he and other SACPO activists experienced during the debate about SACPO participation in the 1958 election and in the campaign that followed. As La Guma saw it, Africans responded positively *en masse* to political mobilisation. The articles that he wrote with Fred Carneson on the 1960 anti-pass campaigns of the Pan African Congress – an organisation that opposed the ANC and its supposed dominance by communists – attributed ‘unity, courage and determination’ to the participants.²³ By contrast after SACPO’s disastrous 1958 election campaign under the Separate Representation of Voters Act, La Guma could only suggest ‘a lot more political work’ to lift coloured political consciousness ‘to the highest level’.²⁴ Politically coloureds were characterised by divisiveness – in *Return to Goli* Peter Abrahams wrote that they ‘lack, as a group, the cohesive stability of the other groups – and their political advancement depended primarily on discursive and ideological means.’²⁵ This distinction emerges clearly in the articles he wrote after his release from detention between March and September 1960 under State of Emergency regulations. Coloureds should ‘seriously assess their relationship with the struggle to liberate South Africa and the rest of the continent’, he argued, because their ‘place [was] with the active forces of progress’. They could only achieve this if they first managed to sink their differences within SACPO, between SACPO and the Unity Movement, and between those coloureds who opposed apartheid and those who supported it or sought to benefit from it. On this basis they could ‘honestly claim’ their ‘place in the sun’.²⁶ Here La Guma urged coloureds to see themselves as part of the international anti-colonial movement that had been gathering momentum since the 1950s. He believed that in political terms at this time coloureds were walking in the night. Approximately 18 months later he had more reason for optimism when he

reported that delegates to the Coloured National Convention (CNC) held in July 1961 resolved that 'the Coloured people refused any special status in South Africa'.²⁷

At the same time, La Guma could use this self-consciously simple style found in Paton and Steinbeck. Her used it to ridicule Dr Verwoerd, 'the Great White Chief himself, also referred to by the lawless and disrespectful elements as "Die Kaffir Koning"'.²⁸ At a Bantu Authorities 'inaugural ceremony somewhere up north' he has the 'Koning' state that

'[t]he elephant is big and has a thick skin, and all big chiefs should also have thick skins...the Big White chief, Dr Verwoerd also has a thick skin and many wastepaper baskets in which he deposits the advice of liberals, the communists and the kaffirboeties. But it is not fitting that chiefs such as you should also have wastepaper baskets...Does the jackal and the hyena have a wastepaper basket? No...Therefore I am going to call on my secretary to present you with presents more fitting. These lovely briefcases...in which you may carry the orders issued by the well beloved Bantu Administration Department.'²⁹

La Guma achieves this parody through repetition, e.g. 'thick skin', 'waste paper baskets', and by repeating names instead of using pronouns. The result is something like a cross between the 'noble' prose of Paton's African protagonists and the speech patterns forced upon 'Red' (American) Indians – characterised by repetitions of proper names and third person pronouns and an absence of complex sentences – in the westerns that La Guma liked to watch. This was not the only instance in which La Guma employed similar figurative and rhetorical devices for different purposes. The next chapter will explore some of the problems which accompany this dual usage.

The dispenser of justice eased his collar

La Guma's literary use and evocation of 'Kaapse Afrikaans' or 'Cape Vernacular Afrikaans' (CVA) is an equally complex issue. It raises questions about his representations of race and class within the context of debates about the constitution of coloured identity – particularly when viewed against his assertion that the Treason Trialists were a 'new nation' in the making.³⁰ As another variety of Afrikaans alongside 'Standard Afrikaans' and a potentially problematic signifier of coloured identity, Kaaps has been described as 'the colloquial language, the vernacular, spoken in the Cape and surrounding areas. It is a form of language particularly prevalent in the population group statutorily classified as Coloured'. In the early part of the twentieth century there were two separate categories of CVA speakers – 'educated, middle-class speakers who used English as a language of culture and writing' and 'illiterate and poorly educated people who neither read nor wrote Afrikaans'.³¹ There are problems associated with the geographical classification of languages and dialects, but given the fact that the speakers to whom La Guma attributed this dialect were largely confined to the Cape Peninsula and the south-western Cape the term 'Kaapse Afrikaans' is an appropriate description.³² Given South Africa's history of racial and class division, terms such as Kaaps and CVA might suggest acceptance of ethnic and economic hierarchies. Van de Rheede criticises any association between language-use and race. He rejects terms such as 'Kleurlingafrikaans' because they can be interpreted as 'a demonstration that this ethnic category is inferior racially and linguistically'.³³ Acknowledging the political problems and academic limitations of terms such as 'Kleurling-Afrikaans', 'Kaapse Afrikaans', 'Working Class Afrikaans' and 'Proto Afrikaans', Pfeiffer nevertheless feels that 'Working Class Afrikaans' and CVA offer the most appropriate descriptions.³⁴

McCormick's study of speech patterns and language use in District Six, where La Guma grew up and lived until 1954, is premised on the assumption that people who need to learn a language for practical reasons 'seldom have much emotional investment in that language's symbolic "purity"'.³⁵ Her primary concern is code-

switching. She observes that 'non-Standard Afrikaans and code-switching (switching between languages or dialects)' were important practices in that community.³⁶ La Guma's father could speak German and on occasions gave political speeches in Afrikaans but, as in many other politically conscious families in District Six, Standard English was the language of home, school instruction and formal political discourse. However, life in District Six would have required La Guma 'to be bilingual in English and Afrikaans, bidialectal in Afrikaans, able to code-switch and', as Chapter 2 has stressed, be able 'to sense when to use which code'.³⁷ This suggests that 'mechanisms of identity-formation' such as language 'never operate in a neutral semantic field'.³⁸ The result is a labile or fluid positionality determined by the constantly shifting social and emotional factors that accompany speech acts.³⁹ Consequently, language choices are an 'indicator of those features of social relationships that speakers [or writers] wish to assert, for example authority, formality, solidarity'.⁴⁰ If this is so, then La Guma's interpretations and representations of linguistic codes in passages such as the one below position him and his characters in specific ways:

The magistrate looked half-amused, half-bewildered. Florence was Percy's wife wasn't she? Yes, they had been living together for the last six years. To Percy, 'You hear? She says you had the coat and you sold it to the other man.'

It wasn't true. He knew nothing about the coat. She was lying to get him into trouble. She was jealous because he had another woman. He wasn't living with Florence any longer. Florence firmly maintained that she was still his wife.

The dispenser of justice eased his collar from his throat, gulped and fiddled with his papers. Percy was called to give evidence from the witness-box.

'Agbaar, on the twenty-ninth of the eighth month I was coming from Mowberry. I came up Primrose Street and in Caledon I heard somebody

call my name. It was Florence. She says to me, Hoe gaan 'it. I says, Not so bed. And she says, You feel like a liddle dring? And I says, Ek sal nie mind nie. So we go into a smokkel-huis in Caledon Street and she buys me a borreltjie...'.⁴¹

In this vignette of two vagrants who evade prosecution by beating the magistrate at his own legal game, there is movement between indirectreported speech in Standard English and code-switching in the form of direct speech. These shifts conform to Coetzee's distinction between the 'narrating intelligence' and the thoughts of a character. They create a heightened sense of actuality. La Guma's goals were to expose the inhumanity of the legal system and to subvert it by showing how even the uneducated could run rings around its officials. However, the vignette achieves this by labelling the users of this form of code-switching as 'lazy, feckless, poor and street-wise'.⁴²

The vignette suggests that the use of Kaaps is a sign of resistance to authority. It is seen to represent a proletarian, and hence politically authentic, deviation from Received Pronunciation and its associations with conservative white, male Afrikaner political and cultural hegemony. La Guma's representations of coloured language-use and political consciousness were not confined to a single technique. During the early stages of his work at *New Age*, for instance in 'The Dead-End Kids of Hanover Street' and 'A Day at Court', both of which appeared in 1956, he tended to rely on code-switching in the form of indirect speech. However, by 1959 as his writing career developed and his journalism became less literary, La Guma had moved towards satire that relied on a knowledge of code-switching through devices such as puns and other forms of verbal play within a predominantly Standard English text:

And, what a shame! Us bruin mense won't be getting our own special kleurling theatre for a long time.... That means the opening grand opera 'Daar Kom Die Alibama' written and composed by the staff of the CAD and featuring the Council of Coloured Affairs, will have to be put on ice.⁴³

He used this technique to ridicule the idea of a 'special kleurling juniversity' which later became the University of the Western Cape. He punned on the link between a mispronunciation of the word 'university' evoked by the addition of a voiced alveopalatal affricate pronunciation of 'j' associated with certain 'subvarieties of South-western Afrikaans' and the second-class junior status that apartheid's segregated educational system imposed on coloureds.⁴⁴ La Guma's play with language indicates that the speech practices of District Six had made a deep impression on him. According to McCormick, District Six residents placed a high value on punning across languages and dialects.⁴⁵ In July 1959 he mocked the Union Council of Coloured Affairs by describing it as the 'UCCA-lele band of Unter-Minister Botha and Secretary for Coloured Affairs Dr I.D du Plessis'.⁴⁶ Combined with an evocation of 'German-ness' associated with Nazism, he established a synecdochic chain of associations that linked the UCCA acronym to the ukulele.

Here the ukelele stood for and parodied the politically sanitised and co-opted forms of 'Cape Malay minstrel' culture that ID du Plessis had constructed in his various capacities as Commissioner, Secretary and Adviser on Coloured Affairs, president of the Cape Malay Choir Board and 'authority' on coloured popular culture.⁴⁷ La Guma's reference to 'Daar Kom Die Alibama', a song which Winberg says is 'most closely associated with the Malays' and which Du Plessis uses to demonstrate the lack of logic in the folk songs of the 'Cape Malays', was an example of 'anti-colonial satire' achieved through indirect forms of resistance such as 'ironic distance'.⁴⁸ Later parts of this chapter will show how *A Walk in the Night* explores other forms of resistance.

In some respects La Guma's reliance on isolated words and phrases undermines his political intentions. Richard Rive has noted that academics and poets (he might have added journalists) 'tend to become patronising under the guise of understanding our less fortunate brothers'. Those who use Kaaps write 'the way he [the coloured worker] speaks but are careful not to speak the way he does'. For

Rive the literary use of Kaaps as an expression of protest against apartheid was self-defeating, for 'by its emphasis on group recognition through dialect, it is in fact bolstering that system.'⁴⁹ Jeremy Cronin also detects political problems, but presents them in a more nuanced manner. He argues that 'Afrikaans is at once the legitimate target of...resistance and an integral component [of resistance]. There is Afrikaans and there is Afrikaans'. Drawing on Jameson's assertion in *The Political Unconscious* that elements of popular culture are 'ceaselessly worked up and neutralised' and F.C. Slater's 1935 anthology *Dark Folks and Other Poems*, Cronin argues that 'use of Afrikaans dialects in English language poetry frequently exhibits...folkloric' qualities. When black poets use these dialects this is a symptom of 'class rather than a racial distance'. Cronin also distinguishes 'consistent' from 'occasional' usage for effect. The 'Straatpraatjes' column in the *APO*, the publication of the African Political Organisation, would be regarded as consistent usage. Occasional usage, such as La Guma's, provides readers with amusement and 'something of a *frisson*' at the way in which the speaker of a text bends 'the "proper" rules of the language, like, no doubt he bends other rules too. Here is an amusing, folkloric slice of low-life'.⁵⁰

Whether or not we agree with Cronin here, La Guma's exposure to Tressell's *The Ragged Trouser Philanthropists* means that he would have been encountered other reasons for bending 'the "proper" rules'. In an article on the novel, Williams argues that Tressell constructed an 'orthography of the uneducated' – not to mock the uneducated but to distinguish 'people who have got some sense and people who haven't'. Thus, the socialist Own and his family usually talk to each in 'standard orthography'.⁵¹ This does not mean that Tressell had inverted what Williams calls 'a standard prejudice of English middle-class writing', for Tressell's experiences and class position generated a more complex and, at times, more ambivalent attitude to the working class. Rather, Tressell used different orthographies to show that 'it is terrible for people to have to live like this [like the building workers of Mugsborough] when they are doing useful and good work, and could do more useful and better work in different circumstances'.⁵²

From Cronin's perspective, La Guma's evocations of vernacular forms and expressions to represent resistance through satire, wordplay and political opposition emphasise class differences more than any other factor. This suggests that La Guma operated with two notions of the working class. There were descriptions 'of the working class' and, quite distinct from the former but simultaneously incorporating it, representations of the working class as 'class and politically conscious people'.⁵³ This distinction gave La Guma the freedom to shift between descriptions of the working class as an entity with specific but ostensibly non-political characteristics, and the working class as a force aware of its historical and political significance. However, by foregrounding instances of popular culture that he interpreted as acts of resistance he tended to retain discursive, narrative and political control for and on behalf of high culture and for 'class and politically conscious people' like himself.

If Coetzee's assessment of Paton – that he used specific syntactic and stylistic devices to evoke 'Zuluness' – applies to La Guma's piece on Wilton Mkwayi, then Cronin's and Rive's arguments deserve serious consideration. La Guma may have been attacking coloured 'good boys' by evoking Kaaps, because like S.V. Petersen they would speak 'correct' Afrikaans, but was he simultaneously ridiculing the non-standard pronunciation of the 'factory workers and members of the lower income groups among the Coloured people'?⁵⁴ These were the very people whom SACPO's 1959 congress (the one in which it became the Coloured People's Congress and confirmed by a name-change its affiliation to the Congress Alliance) noted had not yet been organised into the Alliance. In addition, La Guma's use of Kaaps is most prevalent in articles on coloured politics, thereby adding weight to Rive's observations. La Guma's evocation depends upon an implicit codification of the difference between standard and non-standard forms of English and Afrikaans, and the rules that guide their local deviations. In this codification La Guma is confirming that what he shares linguistically and culturally with his readers divides him and them from the 'factory workers and members of the lower income groups among the Coloured people'. Taking Cronin's argument to its conclusion, codification of language in the form of literary evocation enacts a simultaneous

subordination and separation, and is 'often the manner in which black artists from the middle strata relate to black working class culture'.⁵⁵ From this perspective La Guma's use of bilingual wordplay is symptomatic of a very obvious cultural and educational gap between himself and those he sought to speak for and mobilise politically. The narrative strategy he uses in some of his articles confirms the presence of divisions among those whose unity he desired.

His article on the contradiction between the image of Hollywood-style tough and independent cowboys and the struggle against segregated education in the USA's southern states avoids direct speech forms. While this circumvents the problems we have just noted, it gives rise to others. Based on a conversation with *Dead-End Kids*, it favours the imposed abstraction implicit in the phrase 'The general consensus turned out to be...' with which he prefaces his summary of their response. The political message is clear but as a narrative device it distances the reader from the speakers as active political subjects, thereby undermining the article's political intention. Clearly there were times when La Guma's political project risked being subverted by his determination to communicate a politically correct response, or by his own desire to use literary means for political subversion. Was La Guma contributing to a partial racial recognition for coloureds, partial in the sense of incomplete and/or deficient, partial in the sense of heavily mediated by a perspective with which 'Uncle Jim', Millin and Wallace would have identified and to which the *Cape Standard* had directed aspirant coloured writers some 20 years earlier?⁵⁶

In La Guma's defence, there is no doubt that he rejected National Party and conservative coloured calls to take 'advantage of the "privileges offered...in the economic field by the Group Areas Act"'. He criticised the effects of the Group Areas Act on coloured and African communities in Cape Town and Johannesburg, though he was silent on the implications of a coloured labour preference policy in the Western Cape. Secondly, it could be argued that many political criticisms based on wordplay or associations depend on regional, cultural and historical specificity for their strength and subtlety in conjunction with broader, more generalised

references, and that his journalism as a whole contains examples of non-vernacular wordplay. Two examples must suffice here. One of the pieces he wrote after David Pratt's attempted assassination of Verwoerd ends: 'Now I must stop Pratt-ling and get down to work'. Its success depends upon our recognising the play on Pratt/prattle – an unsuccessful attempt/infantile chatter on the one hand, and the need for a far more considered and organised opposition to apartheid. In 1962 he referred to 'Uncle Tom Swartz, chairman of the third class stooge CCA'. Its effect depended upon readers establishing a link between the political servility associated with 'Uncle Tom' in Stowe's novel and Tom Swartz who three years earlier had become the first chairperson of the entirely nominated and widely rejected Union Council of Coloured Affairs.⁵⁷ Other writers such as Richard Rive reflected these class divisions in different ways. Rive's opposition to 'colouredism' led at times, for instance in *Buckingham Palace*, *District Six* to a dialogue that had more in common with the language of the Damon Runyon's *Guys and Dolls* character or NEUM and its members than with the majority of District Six residents.⁵⁸

In addition, La Guma was aware of the reactionary implications of racial stereotypes, yet realised that these stereotypes could amuse those who were themselves stereotyped in similar ways. We saw this in his comments on the Eoan Group production of *Rio Rita* discussed in Chapter Three.⁵⁹ Where he was regional, La Guma's wordplay is compatible with Gerwel's interpretation of Adam Small's Kaaps poetry which appeared during the early 1960s – even though Small had none of La Guma's personal associations with District Six and was a possible target of the observations by Rive referred to earlier. Small's poetry combined protest with patois, and his and La Guma's projects could be seen as 'essentially ironic: [they turn] a myth, or stereotype, on its head and...the speaker who is traditionally the butt becomes the satirist, the one who unmasks'.⁶⁰

Maybe he thought it was a disgrace, too

The Cold War and the Immorality Act, which for La Guma dealt ultimately with issues of class struggle, racial definition and personal integrity, were two other areas

where he deployed satire, though much less when dealing with the former. La Guma's attacks on the United States of America and his celebration of the Soviet Union's lead in the space race were two sides of the same coin. When he wrote about segregation in Little Rock, Arkansas, his purpose was to show his readers that, like the USA, South Africa could not justify its 'claim to lead Western civilization in Africa'.⁶¹ Deeply critical of the ways in which capitalism encouraged materialism and individualism and destroyed social bonds, he saw little difference between the American and South African 'way of life':

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, Msomis and other tsotsi gangs.

Whether in New York or Johannesburg, there is no doubt that the youth are being destroyed by a way of life whose basic principle is 'every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost'.⁶²

La Guma had already articulated this analysis in his 'Dead-End Kids' pieces, to which Michael Adonis, Willieboy and Foxy and his gang in *A Walk in the Night* and the Casbah Kid in *The Stone Country* would soon give fictional form. Later, La Guma's visits to the Soviet Union in the late 1960s and 1970s confirmed this view of capitalism. His quotation from Dostoyevsky at the start of *A Soviet Journey* conveys his feelings: for Dostoyevsky capitalism was a social and economic system devoid of "fraternity, because what has emerged is the personal principle, that of separateness, enhanced by self-preservation and self-activity within one's own *I*".⁶³ Surely Hemingway's choice of the Donne epigraph which La Guma quoted on several occasions at this time – 'no man is an island' – is its opposite.

The Immorality Act offered easier opportunities for humour, primarily because it exposed the contradictions between apartheid theory and Afrikaner practice. In July 1958 he remarked that the number of Immorality Act convictions in the second half of 1957 'AMOUNTED TO A DEFIANCE CAMPAIGN'.⁶⁴ The Act enabled

him to make jokes about sex and the failings of Dutch Reformed Church ministers, like 'Dominee Odendaal, literally caught with this pants down'. However it also had a more serious side. The Act demonstrated the National Party's determination to ensure what it regarded as an acceptable degree of racial purity and the low regard in which an ideologue such as 'the Reverend J.J. Swart' held coloureds. He regarded them as "‘mongrel’".⁶⁵ This was part of the thinking behind La Guma's attack on the immorality of the Immorality Act and other pieces of 'traditional' apartheid legislation that segregated university education and completely disenfranchised Africans and coloureds.⁶⁶ There were also tragic emotional consequences for the couples involved – particularly where one partner had 'passed' for white or coloured. One of La Guma's articles on this topic referred to a 'bird of pale plumage who passed himself off as one of those across-the-border Coloureds' so that he could have a relationship with 'a nut-brown maid'. Rather than save or affirm his relationship, 'lover boy... prefers jail rather than admit he was Coloured – to save his family from the "stigma" of being labelled Coloured' – and thereby remain white.⁶⁷

Many South African authors and playwrights have used the Immorality Act as a literary and dramatic subject. In comparison with Lewis Sowden's play *The Kimberley Train*, first performed during the Treason Trial and directed by Cecil Williams, La Guma's stories on the topic, 'A Glass of Wine' and 'Slipper Satin', were more restrained and nuanced critiques.⁶⁸ They also had wider, pan-African literary significance for their appearance coincided with changes in the editorial policy of *Black Orpheus*. 'A Glass of Wine', 'Slipper Satin' and stories by other South Africans appeared during what Lindfors has described as *Black Orpheus*' 'second phase'. The early years of Nigerian independence coincided with a shift in the journal's attention from West Indian and Francophone African to Nigerian and South African material.⁶⁹ They were the first two of five La Guma stories to appear in *Black Orpheus* during the early 1960s. The journal's interest in South African writers such as La Guma was in part due to the literary choices of Ulli Beier, the journal's founder, and co-editors Wole Soyinka and Es'kia Mphahlele. Mphahlele was teaching in Nigeria at the time.⁷⁰ According to Benson, Beier favoured 'realists

of the nineteenth- or early twentieth-century sort', and 'leaned in fiction toward stark realism – short stories of the kind written by South Africans' such as La Guma, Rive and Mphahlele himself.⁷¹

It is but a short walk in the night from 'Ma Henry's front room' in 'A Christmas Story' to 'the front room of Ma Schrikker's place' for 'A Glass of Wine'. In that story the narrator and his friend Arthur encounter 'the boy' who had come to see Charlette – 'one of Ma Schrikker's girls'. In an encounter punctuated by several glasses of wine, Arthur becomes increasingly drunk and cannot understand why his well-intentioned comments and suggestions about the love between Charlette and 'the boy' generate more and more discomfort and anger. Only when they have been thrown out does the narrator tell Arthur that "'the white boy can't marry the girl, even though he may love her. It isn't allowed.'" ⁷² La Guma describes their physical appearances and their shy love. He tells us that 'the boy' had 'beautiful red-gold hair... and a pink-white skin', while Charlette's skin was 'the colour of amber wine, and she had dark brown eyes... and around her oval face her hair was very black and curly'.⁷³ In retrospect these details might seem significant, but anyone familiar with the spectrum of skin shades among those previously classified as 'coloured' in South Africa – and this should include the narrator's friend Arthur – would not necessarily see the lovers as 'members' of two separate 'races'. If the lovers' tragedy is their observance of the law – part honesty, part fear, part colour-consciousness – then the story's punchline depends on Arthur's and the reader's colour-blindness.

While Charlette and 'the boy' remain trapped in their innocence, Myra in 'Slipper Satin' is forced to live with her guilt. In this story La Guma introduces his main idea much earlier. Returning home after serving a four-month sentence for contravening the Immorality Act, Myra's community and mother regard her as a 'whore'. She endures the 'needle-sharp eyes of the women' that 'followed her all the way, suspicious angry, and secretly happy, too, that there was another victim for the altars of their gossiping', and the men 'smiling gently at the thought of her conquest. Who the hell cared if it had been a white boy?... A man was a man, and a girl a girl. She was still around, anyway, so maybe there was a chance for one of them.'⁷⁴ This

thinking clearly informs her mother's view. She is less concerned with her daughter's emotional well-being than with the social disgrace precipitated by the return of a daughter who has had premarital sex and who has been to jail just when her other daughter Adie was "getting married soon. To a nice boy of her own kind."⁷⁵ It is of no consequence that Myra transcended social, cultural and legal restrictions by making a commitment to a man who was not one her 'own kind of people'. How far apart she and her mother are on this issue emerges from the fact that for Myra the problem was not being caught but the uncertainty about her relationship with Tommy and what he felt towards her. Did he commit suicide because he could not live with the disgrace?

She began to wonder whether Tommy really had been serious about loving her. No, he must have been.... He had loved her, but it must have proved too much for him. But what did he have to go and do that for? If he had loved her that bad he would have stuck it out, no matter what. Maybe Tommy just couldn't see any other way.... So that was that. Poor Tommy. Maybe he thought it was a disgrace, too. Maybe he thought that, in spite of all his love. But she didn't care any more.⁷⁶

Emotionally dead from the moment that Tommy had killed himself, Myra uses her own bitterness to transcend his weakness, her mother's shame, her sister's innocence, the malicious, resentful gossip of the neighbourhood women and the innuendoes of the men.

Myra is one of the few independent women in La Guma's *oeuvre* who is described in sexual terms. In 'A Glass of Wine' the gaze of 'the boy' remains innocent, whereas in 'Slipper Satin' the narrator describes Myra's body after she has been subjected to the predatory gaze of 'the men'. This suggests that initially La Guma wishes to show how others regard her – as a denigrated object of desire who is 'immoral' because she has been convicted under the Immorality Act. By the end of the story, in a gesture that simultaneously legitimises and criticises the masculine

gaze, he shows that Myra realises the financial value of 'immorality': 'she told herself that Adie would have that slipper satin dress she wanted, as a present from her. She could earn eight guineas easily.'⁷⁷ Devoid of the sentimentality and Runyonesque irony that had characterised preceding short stories, 'Slipper Satin' hints at future developments. Like Michael Adonis in the imminent *A Walk in the Night*, who returns home with 'his thoughts concentrated upon the pustule of rage and humiliation that was continuing to ripen deep down within him', Myra 'felt the bitterness inside her like a new part of her being'.⁷⁸ 'Slipper Satin' therefore introduces a much stronger note of anger, bitterness, impotence and revenge into La Guma's fiction, and marks the point at which Benson's assertion about *Black Orpheus* short stories – that they dealt with 'themes of individual alienation from a society somehow dysfunctional' – can be applied to La Guma.⁷⁹

'Slipper Satin' is also a story of its own – South African – time and place. Like 'Out of Darkness', 'A Glass of Wine' and 'Colour Blind' – a piece that only appeared in a Portuguese translation for the Brazilian journal *Cadernos Brasileiros* in 1962 – it deals with perceptions of race and social mobility in a society rigidly divided along racial and class lines. Set in a 'whites-only coffee-bar', 'Colour Blind' is the story of Mario who was 'tall and swarthy and worked for a construction company'.⁸⁰ Mario is chatting to Charlie the waiter, a man with 'a dark brown face and black shiny hair', about horse racing tips. A man and woman enter. Both she and Charlie react to each other's presence but 'her escort took her arm and steered her over to one of the tables by the window'.⁸¹ Her presence prompts Mario to tell a story. After a day of mixed fortunes at the races, he and some friends have a drink. On the way to town he passes a car "“parked under some oaks by the roadside”" from which he rescues a woman from two men who had "“started getting funny”". He suggests to the woman that they have a drink to settle her nerves; she agrees, and they drive around until he finds 'one of those all-night clubs'. In an attempt to consolidate his earlier act of chivalry he opens her car door "“nice and polite”" but encounters a very different reaction:

‘...She climbs out onto the pavement, then looked up at me in the streetlight. Her eyes went wide and her face reddened. Then she looks angry.

‘Then she said snappishly: “Why – why – the nerve of you talking about taking me for a drink. Why, you scum, you’re actually coloured!”

‘The next thing I know, she’s off into the fog in a huff.

... Can you beat that? She thought I was trying to use her to pass for white. Me playing white! I bet she never seen a dark Italian or Portuguese or Frenchman, even.’ He laughed again. ‘Me, I’d recognise a white person anytime.’⁸²

Mario is perplexed when Charlie appears embarrassed, thanks him for aiding her and asks him not to tell the story to anyone “[f]or her sake, that is. You see, she wasn’t blushing when she saw you when she came in. It was because she saw me. You see, Mr. Mario, she happen to be my sister.”⁸³

La Guma’s stories from this period articulate issues found in his more overtly political writing on coloured identity which acknowledged that the ‘smaller problems’ had to be solved at the same time as or before the main political issues could be dealt with.⁸⁴ Confirming the point he had made in ‘A Glass of Wine’ about the arbitrariness of racial distinctions, in ‘Colour Blind’ La Guma repeats the criticisms he made in ‘Out of Darkness’ of women who aim to pass for white. In effect La Guma criticises them for using their sexuality to overcome their marginality without taking into account the fact that they are doubly marginalised on the basis of gender and race. In ‘Out of Darkness’, ‘A Glass of Wine’, ‘Colour Blind’ and ‘Slipper Satin’ La Guma suggests that a concern with racial markers is a part of coloured identity, and his political writing on the topic demonstrates this. When he attacked George Peake he asserted (as we have seen) that the ‘Coloured people are a historically constituted group or community which evolved over the past two hundred odd years of the intermixture of white people with Hottentots, Javanese, Malay and African slaves’. Charlie’s sister in ‘Colour Blind’ had ‘blonde hair, a little

dark at the roots'. In 'Slipper Satin', La Guma devotes a paragraph to Myra's physical appearance: she had 'blue eyes that she had inherited from the intermarriage of ancestors generations past'. Literally and metaphorically, the history of Myra's family, the supposed immorality of her transgression and the transgressions of her own ancestors, stare her 'respectable' mother in the face. Through 'the men', La Guma mentally undresses her from 'fullness of lips' to 'thighs and legs long and shapely', but goes on to note that her body was a 'little hardened from hard work for four months'. The masculine gaze exposes and criticises her body for being degraded by the consequences of her own honesty. Physically toughened by prison labour, she has also lost her emotional and sexual innocence but has not become the 'degenerate' and 'degraded' woman which the apartheid state, her family and community perceive her to be. Though forced to become what her mother describes as a "damn whore", the pity and sorrow she feels for her mother, her sister and Tommy show that she has transcended the emotional and social limitations of their world.⁸⁵

Let's meet in such and such a café or restaurant in three hours' time
 Following the anti-pass demonstrations and shootings at Sharpeville and Langa in March 1960, La Guma was held without trial for five months in Roeland Street and Worcester. He was one of some 20 000 detainees across the country. Initially Blanche did not know where he was being held. She, Sadie Forman, and Hettie September 'went from police station to police station, Wynberg and others'. After about two weeks

...we were informed that they were in Roeland Street. That was the main big prison, *awful* prison. And when we got to Roeland Street we made ourselves look presentable. A few women went in first. And they came out and they were weeping.... I said, "What happened?" But they were too down to tell me. When I got in I found Alex with a beard, looking wild; he looked as if he needed mental treatment. My mother-in-law felt the same

about my father-in-law who was also detained. They hadn't had a change of clothing because they were taken in just what they had. They were dirty. Of course we had taken clean clothes, and toiletries, and food as well.⁸⁶

Politically, La Guma had anticipated these developments, but emotionally he was unprepared for their effects. According to Blanche,

...prior to those arrests, there was a meeting at our house...CPC meetings...and that is also when huge lorries of food were brought to our house to take to the locations in Langa and Nyanga. And Philip Kgosana had taken over that. And after the meeting Alex said to me, "There are going to be mass arrests, and there might even be a state of emergency", so that when I saw him in Roeland Street, and he said to me, "What happened to you, you never came to see me, why did you leave us like that?" I said to him, "But even you told me this might happen, it's a state of emergency". It seemed then that that was the first time he heard that there was a State of Emergency. I felt very hurt because I would never abandon him, and he felt that he had been abandoned. Well afterwards he understood and we visited again.⁸⁷

Blanche, Sadie Forman, and Hettie September went to see Margaret Ballinger, one of the 'Native Representatives', after which she was allowed two half-hour visits per week. Then the visits were suddenly stopped: 'I nearly went mad...banged on that bloody door...because I demanded a visit.' She suspected, correctly, that La Guma would be moved to Worcester, where the prison authorities were very surprised to see her for the afternoon visiting times. The Black Sash was able to arrange transport to Worcester on a regular basis. Sometimes Blanche and her mother-in-law, Wilhelmina, would be ready at 5.00 am in order to arrive at the prison by 9.00 am.⁸⁸

With apartheid policies under increasing national and international attack in 1960, Verwoerd organised a referendum on whether South Africa should become a republic. In October 1960 the majority of whites voted for a republic, and in May the following year the Union of South Africa left the Commonwealth and became the Republic of South Africa. While Verwoerd exploited the republic debate to unite English- and Afrikaans-speaking whites, the majority of South Africans rejected the policies of 'Die Kaffir Koning', as La Guma had earlier described him.⁸⁹

La Guma began *A Walk in the Night* in 1959 and he appears to have finished it sometime in 1960, though it is unclear whether he had almost finished it before his detention or whether he finished it in jail.⁹⁰ There is more unanimity on subsequent events – that in 1960 Blanche sent the only copy of the manuscript by registered mail to Ulli Beier at Mbari Press in Nigeria, but that it stayed at or was held in a post office in Cape Town. According to Blanche, 'When after a year the book had not reached its destination, I made enquiries at the post office. Two weeks later the book arrived back at our house.'⁹¹ After this, it seems likely that another copy of the manuscript was made. By October 1962, with Ronald Segal acting as his intermediary, Jonathan Cape informed La Guma that they had rejected *A Walk in the Night*. Expressing admiration for the writing and interest in a longer work, their editor felt that *A Walk in the Night* was 'too short and too slight to stand a reasonable chance of success' in the United Kingdom.⁹²

Upon his release, La Guma returned to *New Age* and continued 'being nasty to the Nats'.⁹³ By then *Black Orpheus* had responded favourably to 'A Glass of Wine' and 'Slipper Satin'. When Beier visited South Africa the following year to make contacts and search for manuscripts, he met artistic, literary and cultural figures such as Julian Beinart, Sidney Kumalo, Casey Motsisi and Todd Matshikiza in Johannesburg, and Richard Rive, James Matthews, Alf Wannenburg and La Guma in Cape Town.⁹⁴ Beier arrived at the La Guma's house unannounced. Blanche remembers that

Ulli Beier looked like a member of the Special Branch – tall. And he said to me, 'I've come to see Alex la Guma.' And I said to him, 'Oh, he's not here, I don't know where he is.' But at the end of the day, Alex comes home with him. I didn't know where to put my face. But he says to me, 'Don't worry, you had to protect your husband.'⁹⁵

Given the tempo and profile of her husband's activities after his release, and the state's response to him, her caution was understandable. Bail conditions during the Treason Trial forbade political involvement, but this did not stop the apartheid state from harassing its opponents. In May 1958 La Guma was shot at while he sat typing at his desk, and two months later shots were fired at Jimmy's former home in District Six, which at that stage was a SACPO election campaign office.⁹⁶ None of this prevented La Guma from demonstrating his opposition to the National Party's policies. In April 1959 he was one of several Treason Trialists who signed a letter in protest at the death sentences imposed on people involved in the Sekhukuniland revolt.⁹⁷ In June 1959, with his father in the chair, La Guma spoke at a Congress Alliance meeting and two months later he was the victim of a disinformation campaign.⁹⁸ Posters appeared in Cape Town calling for reform of the South African constitution. The posters named La Guma as a speaker on 'The Benefits of Economic Boycott'.⁹⁹ Despite these attacks, La Guma retained his sense of humour, for in August that year he suggested that De Wet Nel, Verwoerd's Minister of Bantu Administration, deserved a statue. Taking his cue from the inscription at the foot of the statue of Cecil Rhodes in Cape Town's Company Gardens (which would reappear at the beginning of *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*), La Guma suggested 'Yonder lies your Bantustan' as the phrase by which Nel should be remembered.¹⁰⁰ At the end of the year, Jimmy was returned as SACPO president and the organisation changed its name to the South African Coloured Peoples Congress.¹⁰¹

The following year saw a rare degree of agreement between the CPC and the NEUM. Witz has shown the extent of popular opposition to the 1952 Jan van

Riebeeck tercentenary festival. Some eight years later extensive opposition to the 1960 Union Festival brought together the CPC and organisations opposed to the Coloured Affairs Department in a boycott committee that included Jimmy la Guma, Cissie Gool and Barney Desai.¹⁰² Ten months later, after his release from detention without trial under State of Emergency regulations, La Guma chaired a meeting on the Grand Parade which called for the unbanning of the ANC and PAC, and for the unity of all organisations that opposed apartheid.¹⁰³ While local and national political issues remained a priority – in 1961 CPC candidates contested the Cape Town City Council elections and George Peake was elected as a Councillor – the organisation rejected coloured separatism and emphasised that coloureds should see themselves as part of the progressive forces fighting against colonialism.¹⁰⁴ In February that year La Guma chaired a meeting on the Grand Parade called to protest at Patrice Lumumba's murder in the Congo.¹⁰⁵ This reinforced a point he and the CPC had made a year earlier. A later SACPC statement called on coloureds to contribute 'not only towards their own emancipation, but also towards that of the whole continent of which they are a part'.¹⁰⁶ In April 1961, La Guma spoke at a mass meeting attended by about 8 000 people which supported resistance by Africans if the government did not call a national convention to discuss the country's future.¹⁰⁷ In May the CPC made efforts to prepare coloureds for a three-day stay-at-home at the end of the month, and *New Age* reported that Moslem organisations supported the call. Towards the end the month stones were thrown at La Guma's home.¹⁰⁸

Beier appears to have been in Cape Town during the period preceding celebrations for and protest against Republic Day. The All-in African National Council had called for a three-day stay-at-home to protest against the declaration of a republic at the end of May 1961 if the government did not call a convention of all races to discuss the country's future. La Guma helped to organise this protest. He was continually on the move to avoid arrest, but had not yet gone underground, and Beier found himself engaged in an unusual series of literary exchanges. He recalls that

[i]t was the time when S.A. was about to become a Republic. Alex organised strikes in Cape Town.... He was on the run from the police. We could only meet for 15 minutes at a time. Then he would say: "Let's meet in such and such a Café or Restaurant in three hours' time." For a couple of days we had brief meetings like that. We discussed the manuscript of "A Walk" and I smuggled it out of the country.¹⁰⁹

Blanche played no small part in ensuring that her husband remained politically active. For about two months he and others did not sleep at home, but she and Alex would sometimes travel together. She would wear her nurse's uniform, and 'he was the husband whose baby I was going to deliver'. After the campaign was over he came home, slept and went to work at *New Age*, where he was arrested. He was held at Caledon Square.¹¹⁰

Assessments of the stay-at-home's success vary. According to Davenport, the strike had an 'uneven effect because the strikers failed to gain the support of the Opposition press'.¹¹¹ For Lodge 'the 1961 stay-away evoked a far greater response than any of the previous decade'. This was all the more impressive because there was relatively little time in which to organise the event, and the Congress Alliance's largest member organisation, the ANC, had been banned for a year. Heavily reliant on the South African Congress of Trade Unions and the other smaller partners, it was inevitable that responses to the stay-at-home would reflect the participants' regional and sectoral strengths and weaknesses.¹¹² According to *New Age*, 'amongst the Coloured people the response exceeded all expectations. Many factories were completely closed down.... In Non-White areas, most shops and businesses were closed'.¹¹³ The government ignored the call for a convention, mobilised troops and arrested some 10 000 people across the country.¹¹⁴ In the Western Cape La Guma, Reg September, George Peake, Barney Desai, Zola Malindi and Mountain Qumbelo were among those who were arrested on charges under the Suppression of Communism Act and then detained without trial for a twelve-day period under the

General Law Amendment Act.¹¹⁵ While the status of the other prisoners is unclear, there are strong indications that La Guma was held in solitary confinement.¹¹⁶ Released on £100 bail, La Guma commented wryly that he was 'now 50% more valuable than... at the time I was supposed to have committed high treason'.¹¹⁷ He was prohibited from attending meetings and had to report daily to the police.¹¹⁸ In September charges against La Guma under the Suppression of Communism Act were dropped.¹¹⁹

Preparations for the SA Coloured National Convention (SACNC) followed the events of May 1961. The SACNC drew together a number of organisations across the spectrum of coloured political opinion at that time. La Guma's submission on behalf of the CPC to the SACNC held in July 1961 provided the occasion for one of his last texts written in South Africa that dealt with the topic of coloured identity in a public and political context. An affirmation of the Freedom Charter, the CPC document advocated the 'rights of races and national groups to use their language and to develop their culture and customs...in order that they may all contribute towards a common South African nationhood', provided there was 'no special status for the Coloured people'.¹²⁰ For its part, the SACNC was less committed to the Charter, supporting instead negotiation with the government and a capitalist economy.¹²¹ It proposed a definition of coloured that avoided references to national groups. Establishing its position in relation to the Population Registration Act, it noted that

[m]any attempts have been made to define the "Coloured" people. Scientists have tried to do so by pointing to certain common physical characteristics, but this has failed. In law, we are defined as being what is left of the S.A. population after all other groups have been accounted for.... [O]ne unifying factor, found to be common to all "Coloured" people, is the fact that we are discriminated against. We are a recognisable and significant group in the sense that the people who have made laws for this country have singled us out as a separate group, differing from the Whites,

the Africans and the Asians. We are not discriminated against in exactly the same way as Africans and Asians... we are subjected to that social type of discrimination reserved for "Coloured" people, and it is in this sense that we are a separate "Coloured" people.... Convention therefore affirms that the "Coloured" people exist only by exclusion, by discrimination.

Convention therefore rejects the concept of a separate defined "Coloured" people and affirms that we are South Africans entitled by Divine right to full status in every respect in the land of our birth.¹²²

While both the CPC and the SACNC accepted that in part coloured identity was determined by 'the people who have made laws for this country' and the particular types of discrimination that they imposed on coloureds, they disagreed on other issues. Unlike the CPC, the SACNC rejected the idea of a coloured people or a coloured identity and in this respect it echoed the sentiments of the NEUM. At the same time the reference to 'Divine right' suggests that it drew on religious (not only Christian) arguments that all are created equal by a divine being, shared features with a more conservative outlook.¹²³ A short-lived organisation, it was inevitable that the SACNC's resolutions would reflect the views of those organisations least affected by the state's repression at this time.

Thrust back into politics with the detention of many younger activists in the Western Cape with the Treason Trial, Jimmy had opened SACPO's first national conference in 1957. According to Adhikari, he 'had a tough time over the next two years' because 'he had to contend with a number of headstrong young activists who continually challenged his leadership'. In 1959 Jimmy retired from politics once more, but the following year was detained in the nation-wide arrests after the Sharpeville massacre and the declaration of a state of emergency. Three months in 'a cold, damp, filthy cell' in Worcester affected his already poor health. In mid-1961 he was admitted to hospital with heart problems – where he died.¹²⁴ According to La Guma's biography of his father, which the next chapter will cover, Jimmy was a

'political fighter to the end, his last discussion was with a young white hospital nurse who supported the Progressive Party's policy of qualified franchise'.¹²⁵

Returning to Nigeria with the manuscript of *A Walk in the Night*, Beier corresponded with La Guma over publication details. There is no indication that in their discussions Beier guaranteed to publish the manuscript, but in a letter written after he had left South Africa he described *A Walk in the Night* as 'superb', suggested that Peter Clarke should design the cover, and asked La Guma to provide the former with a copy.¹²⁶ Clarke and Beier had not met, but at least three factors contributed to this choice. Clarke had retained contact with Mphahlele since the latter's work on *Drum*; in 1960 Clarke had produced illustrations for a German translation of Alan Paton's *Too Late the Phalarope*; he was a contemporary of La Guma who knew District Six. He must have seemed an automatic choice, but he also faced several obstacles. He did not receive the whole text, only some proof pages, a brief outline of the story, and the information that it was set in District Six [Fig.5.1].¹²⁷ Perhaps his sketchy knowledge of the plot and his intimate knowledge of the District with its balconies – which have little significance in the story as a whole – prompted him to produce a cover which had all the signs of an insider's view of District Six rather than an attempt to communicate the mood of the novella to a non-South African readership.

Appearing in its first edition without the short stories found in the later Heinemann edition, *A Walk in the Night* was the only relatively long piece of prose fiction among the plays, poems and graphic works that Mbari Press published in the early 1960s.¹²⁸ *Black Orpheus* had reached across the continent at a time of political optimism and confidence in the process of decolonisation. In the same manner, Mbari, with Mphahlele playing a leading role, sought to develop a pan-African literature, culture and art that was based in Africa and did not depend on publishers in London or Paris.¹²⁹ According to Dingome,

[s]ymbolically speaking...*Mbari* stands for the process of artistic creation seen both in its physical and spiritual sense. The [Igbo] word itself, with its

connotations of deep faith, artistic creativity, communal endeavour, and a sense of constant renewal, was an apposite name for the community of conscious artists who were brought together by Ulli Beier. The... word, however, was also meant to carry overtones not only of Nigerian, but also of African and even black unity.¹³⁰

Limited by funding problems and inadequate distribution networks, the Biafran war effectively put an end to Mbari. However, during the early 1960s the journal was instrumental in launching the careers of several African literary figures such as Dennis Brutus, Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, Kofi Awoonor and La Guma.¹³¹ With its setting in Cape Town – one of the continent's least African cities – Mbari's publication of *A Walk in the Night* brought information in literary form about the injustices of apartheid to a wider audience, established La Guma as an African writer, and confirmed to an international readership the regional focus of his work.

Beier informed La Guma that he would be invited to participate in a writers' conference that he and Mphahlele were planning for June 1962 in Kampala.¹³² Mphahlele was enthusiastic about *A Walk in the Night*. 'What a story and what beautiful writing', he wrote to La Guma. Unable to categorise it neatly, he assumed that La Guma had 'meant it to be a long short-story, and [that] the story itself couldn't become a full-fledged novel'. He also praised La Guma's writing style: 'It's so crisp, cool and reads like a poem. I said at once about your short stories – that you excel in capturing fragmentary moods – the passing show and this story magnifies that talent.' With La Guma already aware of the Kampala conference, Mphahlele informed him that his novella would be one of the texts which participants would examine, and hoped that he could attend.¹³³

According to Lindfors' research on the teaching of African literature at anglophone African universities, by 1986 La Guma had become one of the most frequently prescribed South African novelists, and among La Guma's prescribed texts *A Walk in the Night* was the most popular. In part this can be attributed to its reception at the Kampala conference.¹³⁴ Taking for granted the pre-eminence of

South African and west African writing at that time, an article in *New Age* on the conference described the South African style as 'often...temperamental, experimental, at times moody, violent, sometimes jazzy' with 'sensuous and racy images'. The West African style was 'freer, easier and less tense'. It hinted at 'a taste of freedom with more eventuality'.¹³⁵ With some pride, it reported that

[m]uch time was given to Alex La Guma's long short story, "A Walk in the Night", dealing with life in District Six... This intense, fast moving story written with startling realism and accurate imagery, evoked many bravos from writers, especially from West Africa. The message is uniquely subtle, they commented, serving the purpose of literature with a greater impact of the reality of the South African scene.¹³⁶

Applauded for its combination of good art and good politics, *A Walk in the Night* and Dennis Brutus' *Sirens, Knuckles and Boots* – the only works by South African writers published by Mbari – 'ran off with the first prize' in a literary contest for black African writers which *Black Orpheus* organised and Mphahlele administered.¹³⁷

By the time Mphahlele's letter arrived, La Guma and Reg September had both received five-year banning orders under the Suppression of Communism Act. The CPC immediately organised a protest meeting on the Grand Parade, and according to *New Age* approximately 2 000 attended at short notice.¹³⁸ Between May and December that year at least 13 people associated with the CPC, NEUM and Anti-Coloured Affairs Department movement (anti-CAD) – an umbrella body of moderate and left-wing coloured organisations founded in February 1943 – had been banned.¹³⁹ Prevented from attending meetings and forced to resign from all political organisations and trade unions, La Guma continued writing for *New Age* until June 1962 when the General Laws Amendment Act prevented any South African publication from reproducing any of his work.¹⁴⁰ Before that, however, La Guma made another original contribution to *New Age*.

They expected a better job next Christmas

The satirical turn which La Guma's column took from July 1961 onwards did not represent a radical departure or a qualitative shift in his work. This chapter has already shown that 'Up My Alley' contained elements of satire, parody and humorous invective against the enemies of non-racialism and socialism. Since he tended to take a more direct route where less circuitous expression was possible, the 'Pampoen-onder-die-Bos' sketches which characterised this final period were La Guma's way of exploiting fully his limited political and discursive options rather than a new development.

In their explorations of the link between his journalism and fiction two important recent contributions to La Guma scholarship have drawn on Hellman's *Fables of Fact*.¹⁴¹ Chandramohan uses Hellman to argue that '[I]inks with journalism led to the predominance of the documentary style of narration. On account of their reliance on "external subjects" for fictional creation, and photographic accuracy of observation many of the works of journalists-turned-writers could be categorised as "fables of fact"'.¹⁴² Mkhize has a different understanding of the term 'journalism'. He limits his use of 'fables of fact' to the 'Pampoen-onder-die-Bos' pieces. He is concerned with the type of journalism which 'deals with fact through fable, discovering, constructing and self-consciously exploring meaning beyond our media constructed "reality", our "news"', and he uses these ideas to contextualise some ten pieces that La Guma published between August 1961 and January 1962.¹⁴³

La Guma's 'Pampoen-onder-die-Bos' is a fictional Afrikaans rural backwater.¹⁴⁴ Among possible sources, Herman Charles Bosman seems a more likely influence than Erskine Caldwell's novel *Tobacco Road*, or its dramatisation by Kirkland which the *Cape Standard* had reviewed in 1942. Describing it as a play about the USA's equivalent of South Africa's 'poor whites', the reviewer had hoped for something similar about conditions on the Cape Flats.¹⁴⁵ If the 'Pampoen' pieces share Caldwell's earthy humour, their settings and characters are reminiscent of Herman

Charles Bosman's Groot Marico, some of whose stories had (as we have seen) appeared in *Fighting Talk*, while the 'Pampoen' parliament and Skietkommando evoke the former Boer republics. Simultaneously, the 'Pampoen' pieces and others from this period contain many thinly disguised references to the political events and people of the time. Viewed in this light, the 'Pampoen' texts confirm by default Chandramohan's assertion that La Guma's journalism from this period demonstrates 'the predominance of the documentary style of narration' because he uses this style to report 'facts' and to generate humour. In a piece that appeared in August 1961, the Kommandant-in-Chief of the Skietkommando informs the Minister of Defence that he is 'in receipt of good news'; two months later 'not chaos, but pandemonium... came to 'Pampoen-onder-die-Bos' when the news broke that the patriotic community had been expelled from the International Soccer Federation'; in November that year La Guma used 'Pampoen-onder-die-Bos' to satirise censorship when he described the 'call sign' of Radio Pampoen-onder-die-Bos as 'sounds made by an announcer trying to read the news through a gag'.¹⁴⁶ Just as he had used a particular writing style reminiscent of Steinbeck and Paton for two purposes – to valorise proletarian experience in his pieces on Wilton Mkwai and to ridicule and to expose the real power relations behind the term 'Kaffir Koning' – here he used a style that appeared to rely on scrupulously observed realities in order to create absurd situations.

Mkhize's assertion that in his 'Pampoen' pieces La Guma was 'discovering, constructing and self-consciously exploring meaning beyond our media constructed "reality", our "news"', also requires modification. Firstly, the presence of Oom van der Mielieblaar suggests continuity between 'Pampoen-onder-die-Bos' and his *Little Libby* comic strip serial. La Guma relied on an earlier text with its own satirical and stereotypical elements and historical references, consequently his exposure of a reality 'beyond' depended in part on the repetition of his own work and his repetition of the stock characters behind his own stock characters rather than simply a direct reference to an external reality.¹⁴⁷ Secondly, by the very act of choosing the publication over more mainstream ones *New Age* readers would already have seen

through South Africa's 'media constructed "reality"'. Thirdly, where he could name or attack his opponents directly he did so. He was one of 15 activists associated with Congress Alliance organisations who submitted a letter to the *Cape Times* and *Cape Argus*. Both papers refused to publish it, but it appeared in *New Age* as a 'guest editorial'.¹⁴⁸ The signatories protested at the dramatic increase in defence spending on the pretext 'that the State [was] threatened by external aggression and internal subversion and that the Government [should] be in a position to deal with all emergencies'. The real reasons for defence expenditure increases were the Nationalist government's apartheid policies and defence of 'the "South African way of life".... It is because this policy cannot find consent either among the majority of the people of this country or amongst the peoples of the rest of Africa and the world at large, that the Government is compelled to resort to force to maintain it', they wrote. Correctly predicting that increased defence spending would not save apartheid, the signatories called on the government to 'abandon policies which lead to violence and death and to extend full democratic rights to all sections of the population without distinction...this is no longer an idealistic dream but the only road to peace'.¹⁴⁹

Compared to the directness of the 'guest editorial', the layered world of Pampoen-onder-die-Bos required more sensitivity to and enjoyment of literary-political devices such as allegory, satire, puns and stereotypes. They could offer rewards that depended on but were not found in texts like the 'guest editorial'. These rewards required the reader to accept the literary and political directness of the 'guest editorial' first and then to find value and pleasure in another way of making the same point. They offered a triple pleasure: one derived from releasing the hidden meanings of his articles, another by belonging to a group that could decode the references, a third by entering into the world of La Guma's characters, some of whom inhabited more than one genre. The 'Pampoen' piece that appeared shortly after Umkhonto we Sizwe's first actions provides a ready example. The '[c]ause of aforesaid hullabaloo (geweld) was a Christmas cracker which some

skulker had put into Oom van der Mielieblaar's festive pudding'.¹⁵⁰ The pleasure of defiance, the pleasure of recognition and the play on news continues in this piece:

The Pampoen-onder-die-Bos *Daily Wail* [a pun on the *Rand Daily Mail*] carried an editorial saying that setting off Christmas crackers was all very well, but at least the setter-offers need not have been so amateurish about it. They expected a better job next Christmas. While the *Daglike Skandaal* cried that the PODB Republiek was in danger, and called for the confiscation of all Christmas crackers in future.¹⁵¹

La Guma's 'advertising hand-out from the Pampoen-onder-die-Bos Fashion Centre' also relies on a combination of politics and punning. It draws on several topical references, including then Minister of Information Frank Waring, notoriously the first English-speaker to become a National Party cabinet minister, when it refers to 'our under-ground department. South African Foundation garments with secret pockets complete with information by Frankie. You should be WARING them today.'¹⁵² The South Africa Foundation was organised and funded by English and Afrikaans multinational mining and manufacturing capital to spread a 'positive' and apolitical image of South Africa.¹⁵³

His discursive forms of protest often relied in different ways on a return, a reworking, or a repetition of previous devices and representations. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that his first and last 'Up My Alley' columns contained the same quotation from Tom Paine:

"These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered. Yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.... Heaven knows how to put a price upon its goods; and it would be strange

indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated.”¹⁵⁴

La Guma’s response to the apartheid state’s attempt to close him down was a gesture of defiance and a warning that the struggle for freedom would be long. Simultaneously, his reference to Paine – radical democrat associated with the French Revolution of 1789 and the American War of Independence – highlighted his ambivalent attitude to the politics and culture of the United States. It also hinted at the influence of North American critics of the USA such as John Steinbeck – a more contemporary figure concerned with poverty, social injustice and collective action – when La Guma’s own liberty was so drastically restricted. The final ‘Up My Alley’ column consisted of La Guma’s photograph, and the word ‘PROHIBITED’ stencilled across a blank space. [Fig. 5.2] There was also a note from the editor: ‘As Alex La Guma is banned from attending gatherings we regret that, in terms of the General Laws Amendment Act, we are no longer permitted to publish any of his writing.’¹⁵⁵

Having established that La Guma’s reliance on the interplay of fact and fiction and the search for an underlying reality depended in part upon pre-existing fictions we can now turn to *A Walk in the Night* – his first published novella.

What I thought life in District Six was really like

Mainstream newspapers such as *The Cape Times* used the arrival of *A Walk in the Night* to say what they could not say or do with a book ‘written by a banned person whose name appears on Mr. Vorster’s banned list and who is subject to the silence clause’. [Fig. 5.3] The *Post* and *New Age* did not bother to obey unjust laws. In a review published in the *Post*, Wole Soyinka expressed his irritation at African writers such as Achebe and La Guma who prefaced their books with ‘quotations from European literary figures’ such as Yeats and Shakespeare, but praised La Guma’s contribution to the development of the African novel.¹⁵⁶ Soyinka wrote that La Guma had ‘achieved what several novels by Africans three or four times its

length are still merely groping towards'. If Peter Abrahams' work displayed 'an anxiety to be "fair" that led to 'total alienation in the reader', La Guma 'deals... in hatred but declines to write within its constriction. Uncompromising truth governs his observation, a total lack of hysteria and a terse economic prose control his theme.'¹⁵⁷

If the *New Age* report on the Kampala conference was written by a South African who tried to place *A Walk in the Night* in an African context, Brian Bunting's review in the same publication stressed the novella's evocation of place. For Bunting, La Guma's was a privileged description because he had grown up there. Premised upon the certainty that District Six would be obliterated by 'a combination of Group Areas [Act] and Boulevard East', a highway that links Cape Town's southern suburbs with the city centre and which represents one of the many convergences of modernism and apartheid urban planning, Bunting's description of District Six with its 'winding, crowded streets, its jostling humanity, its smells, its poverty, its wretchedness, its vivacity and infinite variety' is an early example of those representations on which later nostalgia about the area would be based. This nostalgia would create an impression that differed significantly from La Guma's novella.¹⁵⁸

Though it preceded District Six's destruction, Bunting's comparison with 'a ghost suburb like Sophiatown' implies that District Six had already begun to die or was seen as dead, and that *A Walk in the Night* recalled an earlier era. In a literal sense he was correct. La Guma had not lived there for at least five years when he began the novella. In the novella he refers to 'the quarter known as District Six'. This word, which implies habitation of an area by a particular economic or ethnic group (e.g. Cape Town's 'Malay Quarter') and the designation of that area by those outside it, contains several descriptions and images of death and decay in addition to the actual deaths of Uncle Doughty and Willieboy. The diners in the Portuguese restaurant are 'the mould that accumulated on the fringes of the underworld'. The tenement in which Michael Adonis lives 'had had a certain kind of dignity, almost beauty, but now... was chipped and broken and blackened with generations of

grime'. Constable Raalt's wife 'had been good-looking before they had been married but now she had gone to seed'. In the Victorian tenements 'things which once were whole or new withered or putrefied and the smells of their decay and putrefaction pervaded the tenements of the poor'. The patrol van passes 'leprous rows of houses'. After the discovery of Uncle Doughty's body 'the silence hung like a shroud on the upper floor of the tenement'. The 'darkened doorways' are like 'catacombs'. In the brothel there was 'beauty in the depths of [Nancy's] dark eyes and...in the used shape of her body'. The tall shadows of masts and spars and cranes towered like 'tangled bones of prehistoric monsters'.¹⁵⁹

If District Six was about to become 'a ghost suburb' it was already inhabited by ghosts.¹⁶⁰ In the second paragraph Michael Adonis 'looked right through' the 'lines of workers going home'. In the Queen Victoria pub 'the men took on the vague form of wraiths in the morning mist'. In his room Michael Adonis' curtains 'seemed to hang like ghosts in mid-air'. The brothel lookout was 'an old decrepit ghost of a man'. After the murder Adonis regards Joe as a 'spook' because Joe follows him around.¹⁶¹ All these images revolve around the fatal encounter between Adonis and Uncle Doughty. The narrator describes the latter as 'a deserted abandoned ruin... waiting for death'; after struggling through the lines that make up the novella's epigraph in an attempt to persuade Adonis to return his bottle of port, Uncle Doughty describes himself and Adonis as "'Just ghosts, doomed to walk the night.'"¹⁶²

The epigraph from *Hamlet* in which the ghost of Claudius speaks to his son –

I am thy father's spirit;
Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,
And for the day confined to fast in fires,
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
Are burnt and purged away –¹⁶³

has been a fruitful point of departure for several responses by critics such as Astrachan and Lindfors in the 1960s, and Balutansky and Chandramohan in the 1990s. Chandramohan makes a weak case for the presence of *Hamlet's* phrasing and rhythm in Adonis' response to Uncle Doughty.¹⁶⁴ Another aspect of the emphasis on *Hamlet* stresses the novel's general sense of distaste or disgust at the physical world, the complementary desire for revenge, the expressions of self-pity attributed to Michael Adonis and Constable Raalt and the ghost motif throughout much of the story. J.M. Coetzee regards this 'repetitiousness that becomes excessive and even obsessive, the testament of one man's horror of a degraded world', as the novel's 'more interesting side'.¹⁶⁵ Later, when dealing with the novella's setting, I shall return to the significance of the relationship between Hamlet and his father. For Astrachan and Lindfors, La Guma's 'message [was that] the injustices and ironies pictured here are some of the "foul crimes" which future generations must avenge and purge away or else the peoples of South Africa... will be doomed to continue suffering'.¹⁶⁶ They are saying that the events of the novel are equivalent to the death of Hamlet's father – a metonym for all oppressed people in South Africa – whose ghost will walk the night until future collective social action removes the causes of suffering. There is no evidence that La Guma responded directly to this interpretation, but in a later interview with Cecil Abrahams he suggested that the parallel between coloured political consciousness and Hamlet's father was valid:

One of the reasons why I called the book *A Walk in the Night* was that in my mind the coloured community was still discovering themselves in relation to the general struggle against racism in South Africa... and in this way they were experiencing this walking in the night.... I tried to create a picture of a people struggling to see the light, to see the dawn, to see something new, other than their experiences in this confined community.¹⁶⁷

This statement came twenty years after the novella's first appearance. It might be argued that this is an example of literary criticism influencing a writer's subsequent

interpretation of his own works. However, earlier chapters have shown that La Guma's speeches, journalism and the short stories that preceded *A Walk in the Night* display a concern at the uneven development among coloureds of what he regarded as the correct political consciousness. He felt that expressions of coloured cultural and racial identities could inhibit that development.

For critics who view *A Walk in the Night* as a part of La Guma's transition from journalism to fiction, the work of the earlier 'Drum generation' explored by Couzens provides the paradigmatic example.¹⁶⁸ For Cornwell the possibility of this transition lies in the fact that 'the journalist exploits a whole range of linguistic strategies in common with the short story writer'.¹⁶⁹ With the precedent established, Cecil Abrahams argues that La Guma 'had written a few short stories as a natural consequence of the type of reporter's work he had been doing for *New Age*', and that the short stories and the novel display 'characteristic elements of the work he did as a reporter and columnist'.¹⁷⁰ Chandramohan makes a similar point, as does Mkhize when he says that 'one of the prominent features of his [La Guma's] craft' is the 'documentation of minute details' and that he carried this over from his journalism to his fiction.¹⁷¹ The content of La Guma's short stories supports this view. 'The Dead-End Kids of Hanover Street' and 'Ten Days in Roeland Street Jail' contribute much to the content of *A Walk in the Night*; there are echoes of his work on forced removals in *And a Threefold Cord*; pieces on prison life reappear in modified form in *The Stone Country*. Another largely overlooked continuity links his comic strip and his longer fiction. If Little Libby, the central character of *Liberation Chabalala*, is continually on the move, so too are the main characters of *A Walk in the Night*. Like Little Libby, Michael Adonis falls in with a criminal gang, but while the novel implies that Michael Adonis will remain a criminal, Little Libby's link with Chopper is temporary. Beukes, the main character of *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* is also continually on the move.

According to Abrahams, La Guma's short stories 'rely heavily on narratives that had been told to the writer or on events with which he had been personally involved', and '[s]everal of the stories were created simultaneously with some of the

novels'.¹⁷² The shared content of 'Ten Days in Roeland Street Jail', 'Law of the Jungle' (journalism), 'Out of the Darkness', 'Tattoo Marks and Nails' (short stories) and *The Stone Country* (novel) confirms this observation. Abrahams attributes the 'ostensible motivation for *A Walk in the Night*' to "a short paragraph" that La Guma says he read in a Cape Town newspaper reporting "that a so-called hooligan had died in the police van after having been shot in District Six... I just thought to myself how could this fellow have been shot and... died in the police van?... And so I created the picture, fictitiously, but in relation to what I thought life in District Six was really like".¹⁷³ In the paragraphs that follow I shall examine La Guma's and Abrahams' claims.

While lack of specificity about the actual event makes it difficult to determine the extent to which La Guma relied on and reworked that "short paragraph", a 1940 court case covered by the *Cape Standard* on a shooting in District Six has several similarities. 'Local Coloured people have taken considerable interest in the case', the paper wrote about the death of Amien Isaacs who was shot in Hanover Street by a constable in plain clothes.¹⁷⁴ Other factors support the suggestion that La Guma imagined the work in the District Six of the 1940s – when he lived there – rather than in the late 1950s or early 1960s – by which time he was living in Athlone. Firstly, the majority of the District's inhabitants were coloured but the shop owners were not, and after the Second World War they competed aggressively for custom among the residents of District Six. Secondly, segregation had always been a feature of life in South Africa, but the 1940s saw it increase.¹⁷⁵ Thirdly, in 1940 the Cape Provincial Council proposed local amendments that would enable it to segregate beaches, and after 1948 the National Party extended segregation policies and applied old policies more rigorously.¹⁷⁶ Fourthly, early in 1948 *The Sun* reported that coloureds were losing camping and beach sites in the Western Cape to whites, and the novella reflects that development and its implications:

'I hear they're going to make the beaches so only white people can go there,' Joe said.

'Ja. Read it in the papers. Damn sonsabitches.'

'It's going to get so's nobody can go nowhere.'

'I reckon so,' Michael Adonis said.¹⁷⁷

By the time the story starts, Adonis has already been fired because he questioned the white foreman who prevented him from going to the toilet, and two policemen stop and search him, asking him "*Waar loop jy rond, jong?*" ['Where are you going, boy?']. Prevented from going anywhere yet always on the move, the 'isolated residents of District Six' constitute what Carpenter calls 'a community pulverised by self-hatred'.¹⁷⁸ Fifthly, the limited street lighting La Guma describes in the novella is compatible with reports that in late 1943 District Six received more street lighting.¹⁷⁹

La Guma divides his District Six into areas of negative light and relative dark. Hanover Street is well lit but gaudy and tawdry: Michael Adonis 'turned down another street, away from the artificial glare of Hanover Street'; 'Hanover Street made a crooked strip of misty light across the patch of District Six'; Hanover Street is a 'garish strip'.¹⁸⁰ By contrast, the rest is darker, dirty and decayed. Sometimes it is seen from the perspective of the police in their patrol van. Michael Adonis and Willieboy 'had been thrown together in the whirlpool world of poverty, petty crime and violence'; 'high tenements... rose like the left-overs of a bombed area'; in Adonis' tenement 'a dim corridor lined with doors tunnelled towards a latrine'; 'the patrol van was parked up a dark street and at the intersection at the end of it the flow of Hanover Street was like the opening of a cave'; window-shoppers leave 'galleries of finger-prints' on the glass; the patrol van drove past 'the dark public houses and black caverns of tenement hallways'.¹⁸¹ All these images – of whirlpool, tunnel, cavern or pit – add weight to the possibility that La Guma described District Six as an outsider. His narrator had an intimate knowledge of an area to which he was not or was no longer connected. He saw it as a place inhabited by people who adapted downwards or degenerated, and who had little chance of escape.¹⁸² It also suggests that between the 1940s – the period which La Guma associates with his

reading of Jack London's *People of the Abyss* – and the early 1970s – by which time he had completed *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* – there was little change in his view of District Six.¹⁸³

We also need to examine the claim that autobiographical elements in La Guma's fiction give it a truth to life that enhances its political message. In the case of *A Walk in the Night*, La Guma has explicitly linked Michael Adonis, Willieboy and 'Daniel', a young African boy living in District Six, with whom he was "close friends" until the Group Areas Act separated them. When they met later as adults Daniel "had become a gangster, a street corner hooligan with a pretty bad reputation". Simultaneously there were others, like the East Enders whom Jack London had observed in *The People of the Abyss*. These were the residents of District Six who "remained ordinary people living in a state of despair, not knowing where to go, but just living one day to the other, trying to earn a living. These are the real characters of *A Walk in the Night*." As one of his few references to the District's African residents, this specificity suggests that La Guma had in mind a particular individual, but since the removal of Africans from District Six occurred at different times, the period evoked remains vague.¹⁸⁴ Nevertheless, by linking his memories of a concrete individual with more generalised representations, La Guma creates the impression that the work's political message has a factual basis.

While the factual basis of *A Walk in the Night* remains largely speculative, or based on what La Guma himself subsequently said or wrote, a 1954 *Drum* three-hander by his contemporaries James Matthews, Richard Rive and Peter Clarke makes it easier to define the story's fictional origins.¹⁸⁵ Its title – 'Willy-Boy!' – suggests that La Guma may owe more to this magazine than he has admitted, despite his reservations about its style and content.¹⁸⁶ Rabkin notes that under Jim Bailey, *Drum* was reluctant to accept the story.¹⁸⁷ According to Peter Clarke, the original idea came from Richard Rive, and the idea was 'to take a character then give him a life, each one creating his own story'. At the same time Willy-Boy was 'a kind of nickname that was popular at that time', so all three could have drawn on personal observations.¹⁸⁸ Writing in a sentimental and moralistic style, all three

contributors focus on a District Six 'Dead-End Kid' character in various stages of 'delinquency' from childhood to early adulthood. Matthews' contribution deals with Willy-Boy's early life – the activities that may have led La Guma to describe his own Willieboy's appearance as 'the outward visible sign of his distorted pride in the terms he had served in a reformatory and once in prison for assault'.¹⁸⁹ Like La Guma's later work, Rive specifies District Six as the setting, and both stress that Willy-Boy feels guilty at the mere sight of the police. Like La Guma's character, Rive's Willie-Boy seeks compensation for an earlier humiliation, and like Matthews' character he is bound by memories of his mother.¹⁹⁰ Just as the life of La Guma's character flashes past as he dies, Clarke's Willy-Boy recalls his early years as he drifts into unconsciousness and death from a gunshot wound – in his case accidentally self-inflicted.¹⁹¹ This comparison suggests that Abrahams correctly describes the story's factual origins as 'ostensible' because they have less basis than its fictional ones to his career as a black South African writer of protest literature.

A shot from a horror film

On several occasions in *A Walk in the Night* La Guma uses visual, painterly and cinematic effects. He derives many of these from the experience of watching a film or from the experience of watching others who are watching a film. His references to American popular culture also fall into this category. They suggest interests and concerns dating from at least the late 1940s to the early 1960s. We have already seen that La Guma attended art classes in the late 1940s, that he had produced a comic strip, that he liked watching films – particularly Westerns – and that his 'Up My Alley' column displayed an ambivalent interest in and enjoyment of American popular culture.

Several of La Guma's painterly images evoke disorder or carelessness and contribute to the work's overall sense of decay. Looking down on the city from Uncle Doughty's room, Adonis sees 'a jumble of dark, untidy patterns dotted with the scattered smudged blobs of yellow'; the city was 'a patchwork of greys, whites and reds threaded with thick ropes of black where the darkness held the scattered

pattern together'; the light from a shop window makes a 'pallid splash of light'.¹⁹² At the entrance to the tenement, Hazel's 'heavy mouth, smeared blood-red with greasy lipstick...looked stark as a wound' and prefigures the image that directly precedes Adonis's drunken assault on Uncle Doughty when he 'scowled at the old man through a haze of red that swam in front of his eyes like thick oozing paint, distorting the ancient face staring up at him'.¹⁹³ Later, La Guma describes the mouth of Miss Gipsy, the brothel madam from whom Willieboy, Adonis' double, gets a bottle of wine on tick, as 'crudely painted with bright lipstick'.¹⁹⁴ By default, painterly images also contribute to the sense of control that characterises the work. Nkosi attributes the novella's success to a 'ruthless selection of what counts', but the economy of literary expression implicit in that phrase only works because at strategic moments such as the imminent death of Uncle Doughty La Guma allows the paint to ooze and smudge.¹⁹⁵ Just as he had done in his piece on 'Ten Days in Roeland Street Jail', La Guma enacts a temporary surrender of narrative control. In the former he achieves his goal by switching between forms of speech. In this case he achieves it by switching between graphic and literary forms of representation. In the former the return to Standard English signalled the reassertion of narrative control. Here the precision with which the synaesthetic transgressions are defined reasserts the return of the 'narrating intelligence'.

When the drunken Adonis' criticises Hazel's preference for "'them kissing plays'", his choice of *The Gunfighter* also expresses a preference for the more macho genres – such as western, gangster and horror films – that La Guma evoked.¹⁹⁶ While Adonis gets drunk in the Queen Victoria he imagines himself as *the* gunfighter – 'a mighty tough hombre. Fastest man in Tuscon [*sic*], until the swing doors behind him open and Foxy and the two youths in the tropical suits come in to wipe the fantasy away'.¹⁹⁷ At the end of the novella, on the brink of Adonis' induction into deliberate crime and violence, Foxy and the other gang members hear Raalt's pistol shots as he pursues Willieboy. Ironically, Foxy dismisses their concerns as derived from the cinema: "'What you think this is. The bio? Cowboys and crooks?'".¹⁹⁸ If Willieboy's first method of escape is alcohol, his second is

through fantasies derived from gangster films peopled with 'flashy desperadoes who quivered across the screen', or of 'being transported across where-ever [*sic*] he wished in great black motorcars and issuing orders for the execution of his enemies'.¹⁹⁹ Again, ironically, in another image which confirms JanMohamed's theory on the interchangeability of black South Africans in the eyes of the oppressor, when caught in the lights of the police van Willieboy freezes in the pose of a gunfighter, 'his feet widespread and his arms slightly spread', before Raalt hunts him down.²⁰⁰ Other images confirm that La Guma drew on the experience of watching a film in an earlier era. Adonis' bravery gives way to self-pity, 'like an advert on the screen being replaced by another slide'; in the Jolly Boys' Social Club smoking of the joint brings the billiard game to a halt so that the player stood 'quite still as if a motion picture of him had suddenly stopped'.²⁰¹ If Willieboy's gangster fantasies could only last until 'the picture faded and he emerged from the vast smoke-laden cinema', then the moment which falsely implicates him in Uncle Doughty's death is La Guma's enactment of a film audience's reaction to the sudden disclosure of the corpse:

Then he turned the knob and looking in, looked into the dead blue-grey face of the old man, and it glared back at him, wide-eyed, the stained, carious teeth bared in a fixed grin, with the suddenness of a shot from a horror film.²⁰²

In Uncle Doughty's death La Guma constructs and experiences a film effect that makes him simultaneously active director and passive audience of his own work momentarily transformed into a film.

There are also occasions when he refers to or describes other products of American popular culture. These include the blues music that 'boomed' from the jukebox in the Portuguese restaurant, the Coca-Cola signs in Hanover Street with its 'shrill and noisy... music from across the Atlantic, shipped in flat shellac discs', and Willieboy's association of Chicago with gangsters.²⁰³ In the novella La Guma

undertakes a systematic exploration of American culture and its effects. Beginning with the music, it proceeds to Adonis' gunfighter fantasy and concludes with the bar-room discussion precipitated by the arrival of an American ship. For the taxi-driver this ship means more business. "Been driving those Yankees almost all day. Mostly to whore houses" – like the one Willieboy would visit. "Those Johns are full of money. Just blowing it away on goosies", the taxi-driver says. Adonis envies the sailors because they can buy what they want, and he associates wealth with the USA. The taxi-driver adds to the myth when he replies that "over there... There's mos no colour bar"²⁰⁴ However Greene contradicts them with his story about an African-American who was lynched because he "did look properly at some [white] woman". Earlier, when the foreman called Adonis "a cheeky black [i.e. African] bastard", Adonis responded in the same terms by calling him a "no-good pore-white"; in the bar Adonis distinguishes African-American "negroes" from "us" coloureds; after he has killed Uncle Doughty he knows that 'the law ... don't have any shit from us brown people', and blames Uncle Doughty for his own death because he was living 'among us browns'; similarly Willieboy resents the American soldiers "messing our girls"²⁰⁵ On the basis of John Abrahams' description, Constable Raalt regards Willieboy as 'a real hotnot' and, to complete the symmetry on which the substitution of Willieboy for Adonis depends, Raalt repeats the foreman's words and undertakes to 'gather in every black bastard wearing a yellow shirt'.²⁰⁶ These categories enable Adonis to distinguish coloureds from South African Africans and African-Americans and, despite Greene's story, to claim that "those [American] whites are better than ours"²⁰⁷

This is the limit of Adonis' political consciousness. While the taxi-driver struggles to explain to Greene why the capitalist system should make whites in South Africa and the USA act in the same racist way, Adonis can only repeat the terms of his initial envy when he approves of Flippy Isaacs' response to the news that "his goose is jolling with Cully Richards"²⁰⁸ Yet the difference between Adonis and the other participants in this conversation should not be exaggerated. If Greene does not share Adonis' illusions about the USA, he 'blindly' rejects even the

groping search for a political alternative to the capitalism and racism of the USA. By the same token the taxi driver cannot see the links between institutionalised violence, private property and possessiveness that connect his story to Greene's.²⁰⁹ The previous chapter shows that during the late 1950s and early 1960s – the period before, during and after he worked on *A Walk in the Night* – La Guma produced several pieces that dealt with these issues in less subtle, but sometimes more humorous, ways.²¹⁰ All of these confirm Iyer's observations that the bases of La Guma's hostility towards the USA were 'the traditionally strong ties, both politically and culturally, between the predominantly white American government and the exclusively white regime in Pretoria', 'the obvious conflict between the American ideals of freedom and self-determination on the one hand and continued United States support for a repressive racist regime on the other' and its status as 'a free enterprise bastion and the leader of the capitalist world'.²¹¹

With regard to the representation of the area's residents – by then primarily coloured – Bunting felt that La Guma had his finger 'surely on that beating pulse' because he knew 'the people and their problems, their "troubles," as they call them...their hopes and fears...the desperation and humiliation of poverty, the defiance which grows from despair, the hatred of "the law"'. For Bunting the authenticity of La Guma's characterisation lay in 'the fidelity of his dialogue to the living speech of the people'. La Guma could create 'a character from his speech, the words and accent subtly differentiating the one from the other. This is District Six talking. It is unmistakable – terse, racy, humorous, as convincing as the truth'.²¹² Adonis' contributions to the bar-room conversation bring together two conflicting ideas: the idea of a racial hierarchy, and the 'American Negro Paradigm' discussed in Chapter One. Adonis' hierarchy elevates American whites above South African whites, some of whom are contemptibly 'poor', places South African coloureds above African-Americans and places these above South African Africans. Ironically, the inconclusive nature of the bar-room conversation is its value, for it establishes the political distance that those walking in the night have yet to travel. In different ways it also supports the positions held by JanMohamed and Adhikari. The former

argues that '[d]ue to the *racial* basis of all South African organisation', and 'to the extent that *all* non-whites are treated as interchangeable by the Afrikaner regime... La Guma is able to articulate this generic experience of the disenfranchised South African'.²¹³ The latter argues that instead of 'reflecting a Manichean world... the novel operates in a more fluid milieu of complex social relations and multifaceted social identities'.²¹⁴ Both are correct. It is entirely possible for the oppressed to experience their oppression in the terms described by JanMohamed, who draws on the utterances of Scofield and Raalt, while Adonis' contributions to the barroom conversation indicate that it is possible to retain a more 'private politics of race and identity'.²¹⁵ It is possible to experience general and specific forms of oppression simultaneously.

This raises three important questions for our study of the novella. How conscious was La Guma of the racial and class markers in his own writing? How will our understanding of La Guma's depiction of these markers help us to understand his depictions of marginality? How will these depictions help us to understand the way in which La Guma deals with a widespread problem for the left-wing novel: how to end in a manner that is satisfactory from both literary and political perspectives? We have already seen that in La Guma's political writings the hybrid origins of the 'coloured people' and their intermediate status in the apartheid hierarchy determined the limits and possibilities of their cultural specificity. The example of Myra in 'Slipper Satin' suggests that in his fiction at this time hybridity was associated with desire, transgression and with the decision to become an object of desire. The numerous distinctions between hair textures and skin colours which La Guma makes through his narrators and protagonists suggest that he was well aware of their significance for the people about whom he wrote – as are many West Indian writers. He was aware of how degrees of 'whiteness' and 'blackness' were perceived as markers of proximity to and distance from an ideal of 'white' skin pigmentation, how this could influence social and economic status, and how this in turn influenced the life chances of a socially marginal group whose members might, like Cora in 'Out of the Darkness' or the sister in 'Colour Blind', gain access to the

good things of life by passing for white. Adonis' ideal wife 'with soft hair you can run your hands through and skin so you can feel how soft her cheeks are' shows that he valorises 'whiteness'.²¹⁶ In order to undermine this view, La Guma depicts whites such as the policemen who stop and search Adonis or the murderous Raalt as if they were machines. Thus one denies oneself life, empathy and humanity by acquiring the desired status and this helps to clear the ground for another way of assessing others even if it receives little support in this text. Adonis refuses to acknowledge that Doughty could be his 'uncle' in the South African sense, and thereby denies that they are part of the same community: "'What's white got to do with it?'" asks Uncle Doughty shortly before Adonis kills him in revenge for the treatment he had received from the white foreman.²¹⁷ La Guma's physical descriptions of the characters and the racial evaluations he attributes to them individualise characters in racial terms and simultaneously undermine the significance of these descriptions.

Much La Guma criticism has stressed shifts in class consciousness or explored movement towards a group or class consciousness. In *A Walk in the Night* Raalt's behaviour precipitates this process because it unites the residents against the police. The underlying assumption is that in La Guma's work as a whole a succession of protagonists move steadily in the direction of an organised challenge to the apartheid regime conducted by a banned organisation that operates underground – the African National Congress. This is only one aspect, for there are other ways in this novella through which characters are individuated and aggregated. The fact that Adonis has been fired evokes our sympathy and provides motivation for his actions, but it also suggests that in *A Walk in the Night* class positions and national identities are fluid and unstable. This change in Adonis' class position brings him closer to Willieboy with whom he already has shared experiences. La Guma writes that '[t]hey were not very close friends, but had been thrown together in the whirlpool world of poverty, petty crime and violence of which that café was an outpost'. Their conversation confirms this. Adonis tells Willieboy that he is "'[s]trolling again'". In the South African and Cape Town context this has a particular meaning, for a 'stroller' lives

on the margins of society and is usually a homeless street child, someone who does not have formal employment and who lives by scavenging and begging.²¹⁸ If Adonis describes himself in these terms, then it suggests that he has not yet thought about joining Foxy's gang and that he also has something in common with Joe whose association with the sea confirms his marginality. Their 'principal food is the fish they catch,' wrote *The Sun* in 1938 of these 'primitive rock dwellers' who 'have the most fancy for fish heads'. Describing them as 'the enemies of society' whom the 'house-dwelling Coloured person despises... even more than does the European', the paper acknowledged that 'most of them do not go about with the murderous knife of the skolly' – unlike Willieboy.²¹⁹

It is also clear that Adonis is no stranger to Foxy and his gang. That Foxy makes no effort to hide his plans suggests that he trusts Adonis – preconditions for his subsequent entry into the gang. However, it is Joe's refusal to follow Foxy's path, the links that La Guma establishes between Joe and the cockroach, and Joe's association with the sea that establish him and the stevedore Franky Lorenzo as the bearer of rights, morality, community and resistance. If Joe's 'strange passion for things that came from the sea' is also an early pointer to the influence of the Steinbeck of *Cannery Row* and *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, so too is the relationship between Franky and Grace Lorenzo. Like the Joad family in *The Grapes of Wrath*, they learn that rights and obligations within the family and the challenges which threaten to destroy it are factors out of which a greater sense of community, social obligation and resistance can emerge.²²⁰ The next chapter will explore La Guma's debt to Steinbeck in more detail.

The last part of this chapter will examine the way in which La Guma ends his novella. Critical responses to *A Walk in the Night* that interpret the significance of the *Hamlet* epigraph in social terms, for example Lindfors and Abrahams, tend to treat the reference to Hamlet as a statement about the marginal position of coloureds in the national liberation struggle. Critics who have focused on the obstacles to action or the achievement of personal happiness – other aspects of *Hamlet* – have read the novella in naturalistic terms. Where the emphasis is on environmental

factors that prevent Adonis or Willieboy from achieving their goals there is often a stress on the isolation experienced by each character. Thus the figurative use of *Hamlet* assumes and desires a community that can become self-conscious and can take collective action, whereas the naturalistic interpretation tends to acknowledge the presence of social forces but denies the protagonists access to their regenerative or revolutionary potential.

The other category of criticism that focuses on social forces is Marxist criticism. This includes those who share La Guma's commitment to socialism and those who use La Guma's socialism as the basis for an interpretation of his work that draws on and evaluates his work in these terms. Among the latter, Cornwell argues that 'the plot of each novel is structured according to the socio-economic dialectic of Marxist ideology, which reinforces the priority of the external and the concrete, and naturally entails a sociological rather than a psychological view of character.' This is a limitation because 'it detracts from the conscientising potential of his work as social protest'.²²¹ Among the former, Mkhize acknowledges that La Guma's 'narrative style is naturalistic insofar as it reveals his often cited pre-occupation with the documentation of minute details', and attributes this to his journalism and the influence of writers such as Farrell, Steinbeck, Hemingway and Zola. Mkhize takes up Coetzee's view that 'the most comprehensive political statement that La Guma makes in the novel' is 'a critique of the Coloured proletariat' for its lack of political consciousness as proof that it is not a naturalistic text. He argues that *A Walk in the Night* is an example of critical realism because it develops a critique of the society it portrays without displaying the basis of a socialist alternative. The rest of La Guma's fiction represents 'his attempt to adapt the socialist realist tradition to the realities of the South African situation'.²²² Balutansky disagrees with the view that La Guma is a critical or socialist realist. Her emphasis on irony suggests the influence of *The Theory of the Novel* and the 'early' Lukács. For Balutansky, the novel's 'larger formal structure... is established in the descriptive style, the portrayal of character, and, most importantly, in the ironic effect of the work's symbolic framework'.²²³

Despite their differences, these three critics agree that the workings of *A Walk in the Night* can be characterised by some form of inner tension through which La Guma articulates his criticisms of South African society and his search for a more just alternative. This could be a 'socio-economic dialectic of Marxist ideology', a form of 'critical realism' as a stage towards socialist realism, or as a conflict 'between appearance (static plot) and reality (political movement)'. In *A Walk in the Night* water, wind, animals and grime are the most consistent and pervasive figurative devices or image clusters for portraying this tension. There is a 'stream of...traffic rolling in from the suburbs'.²²⁴ This movement inward provides the conditions for the later surges that characterise the crowd's response to Raalt's actions. The two policemen who stop and search Adonis 'cut a path through the stream on the pavement like destroyers at sea'; by contrast, Uncle Doughty is like 'wreckage disintegrating on a hostile beach'; after escaping from the tenement unnoticed, Adonis heads for the 'Indian café' 'like a lost ship sighting a point of land for the first time after a long and hopeless voyage'.²²⁵ As he leaves the pub 'the doors flap-flapping and the murmur of voices from inside had the sound of surf breaking on the beach'; after the discovery of Doughty's body, Adonis listens to the voices of the tenement crowd that subside 'to the muttering sound of distant breakers whispering against rocks'.²²⁶ He watches the tenement crowd 'spill onto the pavement' as it becomes a 'small whirlpool around the vortex of a man'. Later in the presence of Raalt the crowd 'edded and rippled'.²²⁷ This may have its origin in *In Dubious Battle* where Steinbeck describes one of the organisers: 'looking at the crowd, [he] saw it come to life, it swirled. An excited commotion overcame it. The mob edded, broke and started back to the truck.'²²⁸

The image of water is present from the first paragraph, and La Guma uses it to describe the physical movement of people and the attitude and status of individuals and groups: but it also changes in two ways. It combines with images of dirt, grime and decay, and animal behaviour, and it acquires the status of what Carpenter calls a 'scene of representation'. According to Carpenter, La Guma establishes a 'scene of representation' by dramatising 'the formation of self-conscious collective presence

by assembling characters unconscious of a collective identity at a “scene” where they can form the kind of collective presence necessary for any kind of representation (and which the text, as a linguistic, not to mention a literary, artefact, assumes).²²⁹ These combined images create the conditions for the cockroach that in this work has mostly positive connotations. La Guma compares Joe, who articulates concern for his fellow human beings, to a cockroach; the taxi driver who wrestles with ideas about the colour bar and capitalism has ‘eyes as brown and alert as cockroaches’; after the police have locked Uncle Doughty’s room a cockroach emerges to feast on ‘the mixture of spilled liquor and vomit’.²³⁰ Ever alert, evasive and irrepressible, the cockroach represents the return of the repressed and complements the surging motion of the crowd that gathers after Raalt has shot Willieboy.²³¹ At this moment Raalt – who had stalked Willieboy like a hunter and shot him when he was ‘crouched like a fear-crazed animal at bay’ – and the crowd briefly experience a reversal of roles.²³² This is also the point at which animal and water image clusters combine:

The crowd roared again, the sound breaking against the surrounding houses. They wavered for a while and then surged forward, then rolled back, muttering before the cold dark muzzle of the pistol. The muttering remained, the threatening sound of a storm-tossed ocean breaking against a rocky shoreline.²³³

This is also Carpenter’s ‘scene of representation’ and it has two phases. Firstly, according to Carpenter, La Guma unifies ‘the voices of the bystanders... as if the people united were a natural force’. Secondly, La Guma constitutes the crowd as ‘an unpredicated grammatical subject, an object of pure designation, an embodiment of significance in the eyes of the collective formed by readers and writer’.²³⁴ Carpenter has ignored the signs that his ‘object of pure designation’ can interpret symbolic forces and therefore can generate meaning for itself. This seems to be the implication behind La Guma’s description of the ‘slight breeze [that] had sprung up over the

city'. At this point, people were 'waiting aimlessly'.²³⁵ Later, after the death of Doughty, La Guma refers to a 'breeze that came in from the south-east, and disappeared'. Now the people 'searched for the sign of wind', a wind of change that would unite all the smells and the people of District Six.²³⁶ By the end of the novel, when Willieboy has been shot and the crowd has become a 'scene of representation', one of Foxy's gang remarks that "'...she's going to blow tomorrow'".²³⁷

Nor does Carpenter deal with one of the text's most problematic tensions – that the crowd only becomes a collective and self-conscious agent by acquiring the qualities that the oppressor attributes to it. The crowd acquires the qualities of an animal – not unlike the description of a crowd in Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* – just when it had voiced its opposition to Raalt as the representative of an oppressive system: "'...you ought to of seen them. It was like all of them disappeared, and it was just one big – animal, going down the road. Just all one animal.'"²³⁸ Politically, this may be the weakest point of La Guma's novella. The 'scene of representation' necessarily raises questions about how La Guma concludes this work, and what Balutansky calls its liberating 'symbolic framework' shows its collective protagonist in its most negative light.

It is possible that La Guma had reservations about the way in which he combined this demonstration of power with the absence of reflective capacity, because in the last chapter attention shifts to more individualised characters – Foxy and his gang, the cockroach, John Abrahams, Joe, and Franky and Grace Lorenzo. Joe's journey towards the sea combines 'real' and 'symbolic' aspects of resistance. It is a refusal to accept the containment and divisions imposed by segregation and apartheid within and outside District Six. It combines his altruism with the novel's closing symbols of resistance – the waves breaking against the walls and the embryo in Grace's womb – and clearly stands in opposition to the isolated and ostracised 'fifth column' behaviour of Abrahams. Through the images of waves and pregnancy the conclusion expresses a desire for the birth of a collective political entity that is simultaneously destructive and creative.

In itself the expression of a desire does not provide a satisfactory conclusion, and a brief comparison with the ending of *Liberation Chabalala* helps to explain why this is so. There are moments when the comic enacts its own subversion, but in general it is a 'readerly' text in the Barthesian sense. This 'readerly' quality is not a function of the comic genre but of the way in which La Guma treated his subject matter. Though it remains within the realist tradition, the ending of *A Walk in the Night* is more 'writerly' and is open to a greater variety of interpretations.²³⁹ In literary terms the novella has a more sophisticated and complex conclusion than its predecessor the comic. In political terms relatively little separates the two endings, and it might even be argued that politically speaking in *A Walk in the Night* La Guma takes a step backward. Even if we take into account a degree of self-conscious irony in the comic, the depiction of a political dawn in which workers enthusiastically take leaflets that call on them to stay away from work has more in common with the more 'advanced' *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*. If La Guma's longer fiction depicts increasing levels of political consciousness and organisation then there is little indication of this in the endings of his first two extended works.

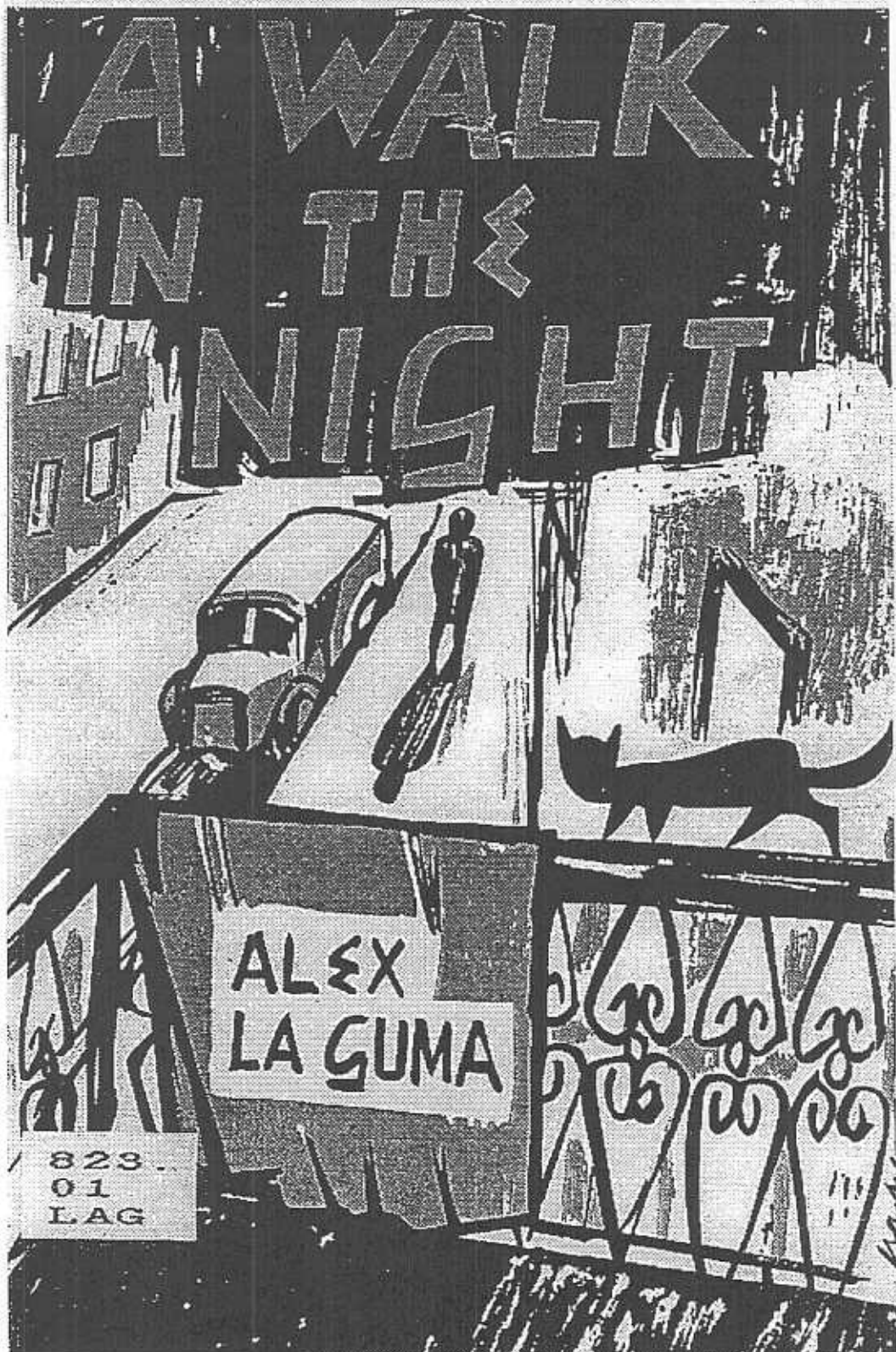


Fig. 5.1: Peter Clarke's cover for the Mbari edition of *A Walk in the Night* (Source: National English Literary Museum)

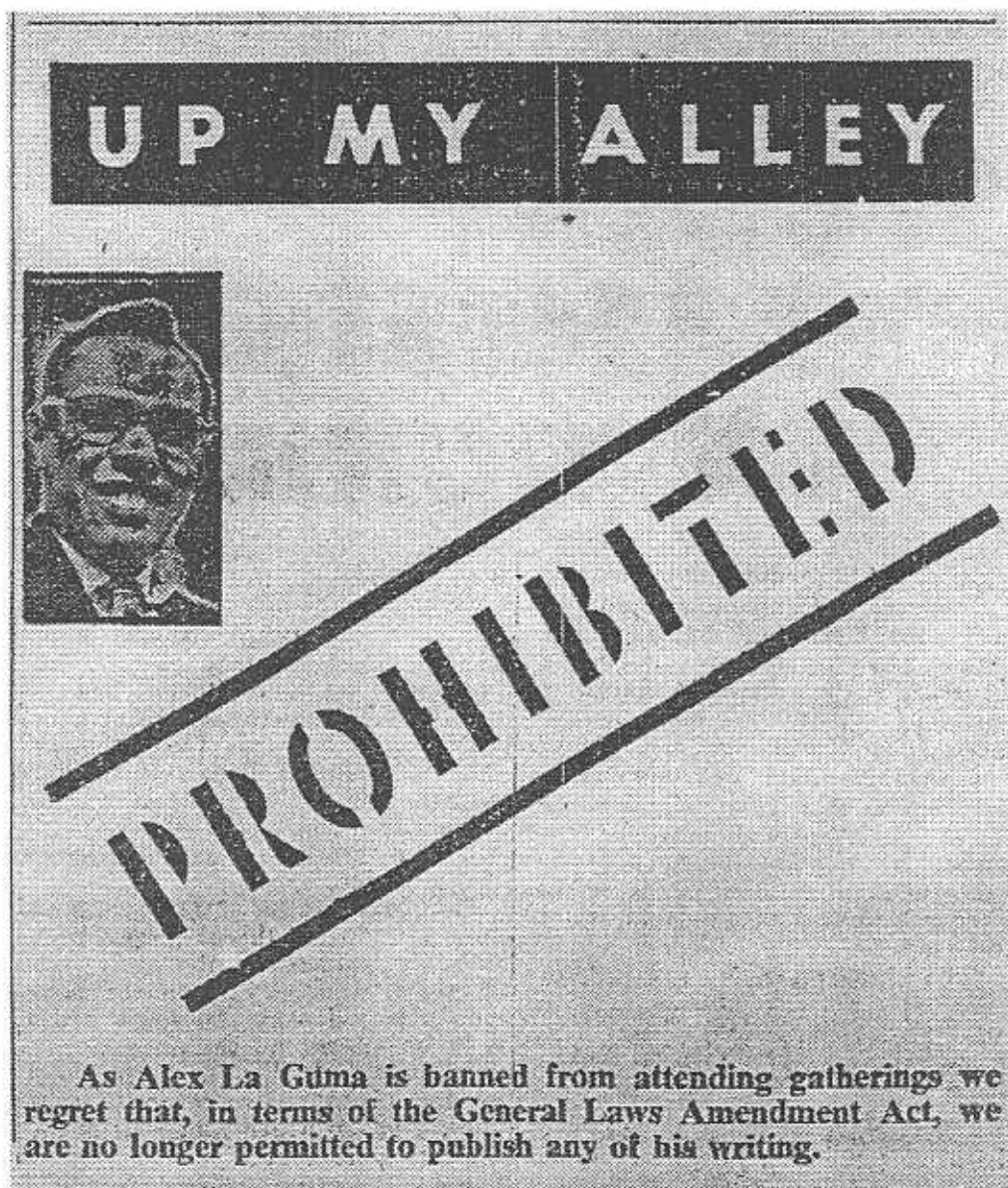


Fig. 5.2 (Source: *New Age* 27 June 1959)

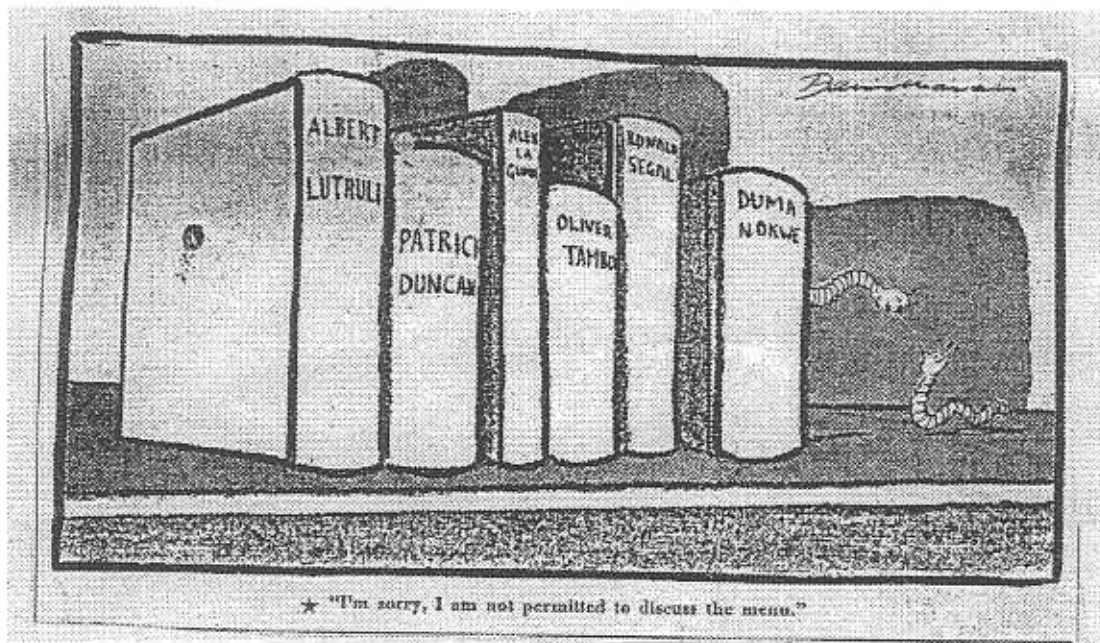


Fig. 5.3: Cape Times cartoon (Source: Cape Times 25 August 1962)

Endnotes

- ¹ A. la Guma, 'Out of Darkness', pp. 33-38; Blanche la Guma, interview, 17 April 1998.
- ² A. la Guma, 'Can We Build a New Life Overseas?' *New Age* 7 February 1957.
- ³ La Guma, 'Out of Darkness', pp. 33, 36.
- ⁴ La Guma, 'Etude'.
- ⁵ D. Runyon, *Guys and Dolls* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1960); A. la Guma, 'The Gladiators', in *A Walk in the Night and Other Stories*; Dr I. Combrinck has confirmed La Guma's interest in Runyon.
- ⁶ La Guma, 'Out of Darkness', pp. 35, 37-38.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-36.
- ⁸ See also Gareth Cornwell's M.A. thesis, 'Protest in fiction: an approach to Alex la Guma', p. 100.
- ⁹ La Guma, 'Out of Darkness', pp. 35-36;
- ¹⁰ J.J. Benson, *Hemingway: The Writer's Art of Self-Defense* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1969), p. 31.
- ¹¹ S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1978), pp. 509, 454.
- ¹² *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 9-10, 19.
- ¹³ La Guma, 'Out of Darkness', p. 35; A. la Guma, 'Tattoo Marks and Nails', *Black Orpheus*, 14, (1964); repr. in *A Walk in the Night and Other Stories*, pp. 97-107.
- ¹⁴ J. Lacan, 'The agency of the letter of the unconscious or reason since Freud', in *Ecrits* (Routledge, London, 1992), p. 175.
- ¹⁵ R.J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire*, p. 48.
- ¹⁶ La Guma, 'Court Cameos', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 38.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- ¹⁸ 'Lionel Forman', in The Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection; La Guma, 'Court Cameos', p. 39.
- ¹⁹ La Guma, 'Ncincilili! In Praise of Wilton Mkwayi!', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 41.
- ²⁰ J. Opland, *Xhosa Poets and Poetry* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1998), p. 30.
- ²¹ La Guma, 'The City of Gold', in *Liberation Chabalala* pp. 49-50.
- ²² R. Carter and W. Nash, *Seeing Through Language* (Blackwell, Oxford: 1994), p. 11; Dr Irwin Combrinck, interview; J.M. Coetzee, *White Writing* (Radix, Sandton, 1988), p. 128; S. Stewart, *On Longing*, p. 23.
- ²³ La Guma, 'Langa 1960', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 141-145.
- ²⁴ La Guma, 'Forty Per Cent Poll', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 127-128.
- ²⁵ P. Abrahams, *Return to Goli*, p. 57.
- ²⁶ La Guma 'SACPC Statement', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 152-3.
- ²⁷ La Guma 'Coloured Convention', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 160-161.
- ²⁸ La Guma, 'Parliament', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 184.
- ²⁹ La Guma, 'Herr Doktor Verwoerd PM', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 186.
- ³⁰ F. Ponelis, 'Codes in contradiction: The sociolinguistics of "Straatpraatjes"', in M. Adhikari, (ed.), *Straatpraatjes: Language, politics and popular culture in Cape Town, 1909-1922* (J.L. van Schaik, Pretoria, 1996), p. 131.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² R.H. Pheiffer, "'Straatpraatjes' – 'n vroeë voorbeeld van Alternatiewe Afrikaans', in M. Adhikari (ed.), *Straatpraatjes*, p. 161.
- ³³ I.V. van de Rheede, "'Kaapse Afrikaans: 'n sosio-politieke perspektief', in J.F. Smith et al (eds), *Swart Afrikaanse Skrywers*, p. 35.
- ³⁴ Pheiffer, "'Straatpraatjes"', p. 161.

- ³⁵ K. McCormick, 'The Vernacular of District Six', p. 88.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 96.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 92, 100.
- ³⁸ P. Stallybrass and A. White, p. 198.
- ³⁹ M. Gardiner, *The Dialogics of Critique: M.M. Bakhtin and the Theory of Ideology* (Routledge, London, 1992), p. 37.
- ⁴⁰ K. McCormick, p. 100.
- ⁴¹ La Guma, 'A Day at Court', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 7 [punctuation in original].
- ⁴² K. McCormick, p. 91.
- ⁴³ La Guma, 'Colouredstan', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 133-4.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*; F. Ponelis, p. 131.
- ⁴⁵ K. McCormick, p. 105.
- ⁴⁶ La Guma, 'Colouredstan', p. 133.
- ⁴⁷ S. Jeppie, 'Historical Process and the Constitution of Subjects: I.D. du Plessis and the Reinvention of the "Malay"' (University of Cape Town, Honours thesis, 1987).
- ⁴⁸ C. Winberg, "'Ghoemaliedjies'", pp. 5, 2.
- ⁴⁹ R. Rive, 'Culture, Colouredism and Kaaps'. In J.F. Smith et al (eds), *Swart Afrikaanse Skrywers*, p. 63.
- ⁵⁰ J. Cronin, "'Laat ons nou ranks vassa" -- African poets and the use of Afrikaans'. In J.F. Smith et al (eds), *Swart Afrikaanse Skrywers*, p. 59; *New Age* 13 August 1959, 31 December 1959.
- ⁵¹ R. Williams, 'The Ragged-Arsed Philanthropists', in R. Williams, *Writing in Society* (Verso, London, 1991), pp. 254-255.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 255-256.
- ⁵³ La Guma 'Why I Joined the Communist Party', p. 50.
- ⁵⁴ *New Age*, 13 August 1959, 31 December 1959.
- ⁵⁵ J. Cronin, p. 59.
- ⁵⁶ *New Age*, 8 October, 1959; La Guma, in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 14-16, 170; see Chapter 2 of this thesis.
- ⁵⁷ George Golding, cited by La Guma, in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 135; D. Chiaro, *The Language of Verbal Play* (Routledge, London, 1992), p. 59; La Guma, in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 150, 139, 118-120; G. Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, p. 270.
- ⁵⁸ A. Wannenburg, 'Memories of Richard', *New Contrast* vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 31-34.
- ⁵⁹ *New Age*, 13 September 1959.
- ⁶⁰ G.J. Gerwel 'Van Petersen tot die hede', in J.F. Smith et al (eds.), *Swart Afrikaanse Skrywers*, pp. 11-22 [translation by R. Field].
- ⁶¹ La Guma, in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 170-171; L.H. Iyer, 'African Views of the United States in the Works of Achebe, La Guma and Achebe' (University of California, Ph.D. thesis, 1987), pp. 117-134.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 174.
- ⁶³ La Guma, *A Soviet Journey*, p. 24.
- ⁶⁴ La Guma, in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 202.
- ⁶⁵ La Guma, in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 201.
- ⁶⁶ La Guma, *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 200.
- ⁶⁷ La Guma, *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 198.
- ⁶⁸ L. Sowden, *The Kimberley Train* (Timmins, Cape Town, 1976); P. Altman, 'Plays of Protest', *Fighting Talk* (November 1958), p. 13; La Guma, 'A Glass of Wine' and 'Slipper Satin', in R. Rive (ed.) *Quartet*, pp. 91-96 and 67-73 (first published in *Black Orpheus*, 6 and 7 (1960)).
- ⁶⁹ B. Lindfors, 'Black Orpheus', in A.S. Gérard (ed.), *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1986), p. 671.
- ⁷⁰ B. Lindfors, 'Black Orpheus', pp. 669-670.
- ⁷¹ P. Benson, *Black Orpheus, Transition and Modern Cultural Awakening in Africa* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986), pp. 27, 51, 37.
- ⁷² La Guma, 'A Glass of Wine', p. 96.

- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp 91, 94.
- ⁷⁴ La Guma, 'Slipper Satin', pp. 67-68.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 69, 70.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 71.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 73.
- ⁷⁸ La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, p. 1; 'Slipper Satin', p. 68.
- ⁷⁹ P. Benson, *Black Orpheus, Transition...*, p. 50.
- ⁸⁰ La Guma, 'Colour Blind'. Original ms. in the Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection.
- ⁸¹ La Guma, 'Colour Blind', pp 1, 2.
- ⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 4, 5 (emphasis in original).
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 5 (emphasis in original).
- ⁸⁴ *South African Political Materials*, 2:DS/2:30/4, pp. 6-7.
- ⁸⁵ La Guma, 'Colour Blind', p. 2; 'Slipper Satin', p. 68.
- ⁸⁶ Blanche la Guma, interview by W. Kodesh, 24 August 1993 (transcribed by Rosemary Ridd).
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*; for other accounts of detainees' first experiences of detention at Caledon Square, see D. Foster, *Detention and Torture in South Africa: psychological, legal and historical studies* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1987), p. 123: 'I think that it is probably, if you take the interrogation and detention as a total reality, it is probably one of the most traumatic moments in the whole, that moment of being locked up, being thrown into a cell and that door being slammed behind you. It's indescribable, it really is like a huge punch in the stomach. I remember distinctly as they slammed that cell door closed, it was heavy, it's an old type of cell door, the Caledon Square building is still very old, and it has a thud that's not describable, it's almost like a huge log that's being thrown down from a high distance, or from a big height, and it just knocks into you.'
- ⁸⁸ This paragraph draws extensively on p. xiii of A. Odendaal and R. Field's Introduction to *Liberation Chabalala*.
- ⁸⁹ Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History*, pp. 398-8; La Guma, in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 184.
- ⁹⁰ Blanche la Guma, interview with A. Odendaal, 4 April 1989, states that La Guma gave her the ms. while in Worcester; Blanche la Guma, in her interview with R. Field, states that he had finished the ms., and that he told her where to find it.
- ⁹¹ B. la Guma, 'A Wife's Memory', p. 12.
- ⁹² Correspondence, Tom Maschler to La Guma, 29 October 1962, in the Blanche and Alex La Guma collection.
- ⁹³ La Guma, 'Brick-bats and Bouquets', *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 149 (*New Age*, 8 September 1960).
- ⁹⁴ P. Benson, *Black Orpheus, Transition...*, p. 35.
- ⁹⁵ Blanche la Guma, interview with R. Field, 17 April 1998.
- ⁹⁶ *New Age*, 15 May 1958, 31 July 1958.
- ⁹⁷ *New Age*, 15 May 1958, 31 July 1958, 30 April 1959. With Mma Tau's references to 'Ukongo' and the community's retreat into the hills at the end of *Time of the Butcherbird*, La Guma appears to have combined elements of several rural revolts in the late 1950s and early 1960s with his father's involvement in Ebenezer during 1936 and 1937, along with details from *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *The Grapes of Wrath* (pp. 82, 118).
- ⁹⁸ *New Age*, 2 July 1959.
- ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6 August 1959.
- ¹⁰⁰ *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, p. 12; *New Age*, 24 August 1959.
- ¹⁰¹ *New Age*, 31 December 1959.
- ¹⁰² L. Witz, 'From Langa Market Hall and Rhodes' Estate to the Grand Parade and the Foreshore: Contesting Van Riebeeck's Cape Town', *Kronos: Journal of Cape History*, 25 (1998), pp. 187-206; *New Age*, 18 February 1960.
- ¹⁰³ *New Age*, 13 October 1960.
- ¹⁰⁴ *New Age*, 9 February 1961, 31 May 1961.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 23 February 1961.

- ¹⁰⁶ La Guma, in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 150; *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 153.
- ¹⁰⁷ *New Age*, 13 April 1961.
- ¹⁰⁸ *New Age*, 4 May 1961, 11 May 1961, 25 May 1961.
- ¹⁰⁹ Correspondence, U. Beier to R. Field, 31 August 1994.
- ¹¹⁰ B. la Guma, interview, 17 April 1998.
- ¹¹¹ Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History*, p. 402.
- ¹¹² T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa*, pp. 196-7.
- ¹¹³ *New Age*, 1 June 1961.
- ¹¹⁴ T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa*, p. 196.
- ¹¹⁵ *New Age*, 8 June 1961, 22 June 1961; K. Luckhardt and B. Wall, *Organise... or Starve!*, p. 438.
- ¹¹⁶ *New Age*, 8 June 1961, 22 June 1961.
- ¹¹⁷ *New Age*, 22 June 1961. La Guma's reference to sterling may have been habit; South Africa had converted to Rands and cents in February that year.
- ¹¹⁸ *New Age*, 29 June 1961.
- ¹¹⁹ *New Age*, 14 September 1961.
- ¹²⁰ *South African Political Materials*, 2:DS2:81/1.
- ¹²¹ G. Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, p. 271.
- ¹²² *South African Political Materials*, 2:DS:62/1; *New Age*, 13 July 1961.
- ¹²³ M. Adhikari, "Let us live for our children", pp. 85, 150.
- ¹²⁴ La Guma, *Jimmy La Guma*, p. 79; M. Adhikari, *James La Guma*, pp. 51-3.
- ¹²⁵ La Guma, *Jimmy La Guma*, p. 80.
- ¹²⁶ Correspondence, U. Beier to La Guma, 19 May 1961 (Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection).
- ¹²⁷ Peter Clarke, interview; Clarke's painting 'Haunted Landscape', provides the cover illustration for G. Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall: A history of South African 'Coloured' politics*.
- ¹²⁸ J. N. Dingome, 'Mbari', in A. S. Gérard (ed.), *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1986), p. 684.
- ¹²⁹ A.R. Yesufu, 'Mbari Publications: a pioneer Anglophone African publishing house', in H. Zell (ed.), *The African Book Publishing Record*, VIII, 2 (1982), p. 53.
- ¹³⁰ J.N. Dingome, 'Mbari', p. 682.
- ¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.
- ¹³² Correspondence, U. Beier to La Guma, n.d., in the Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection.
- ¹³³ Correspondence, E. Mphahlele to La Guma, 28 May 1962, in the Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection.
- ¹³⁴ B. Lindfors, 'The Teaching of African Literature at Anglophone African Universities: An Instructive Canon', in B. Lindfors (ed.), *Long Drums and Canons: Teaching and Researching African Literatures* (Africa World Press, Trenton, 1995), pp. 54-55.
- ¹³⁵ *New Age*, 28 June 1962.
- ¹³⁶ *New Age*, 28 June 1962.
- ¹³⁷ E. Mphahlele, *Afrika My Music* (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1984), p. 33.
- ¹³⁸ *New Age*, 29 July 1961.
- ¹³⁹ *New Age*, 14 December 1961; G. Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall*, pp. 213-214.
- ¹⁴⁰ *New Age*, 28 June 1962.
- ¹⁴¹ J. Hellman, *Fables of Fact: The New Journalism as New Fiction* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1981).
- ¹⁴² B. Chandramohan, *A Study in Trans-Ethnicity*, p. 78.
- ¹⁴³ J. Mkhize, 'Journalism: The Roots of La Guma's Counter-Discourse', paper presented at the La Guma Colloquium, University of the Western Cape, December 1995.
- ¹⁴⁴ The following paragraphs draw on pp xiv-xv of A. Odendaal and R. Field's Introduction to *Liberation Chabalala*.
- ¹⁴⁵ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road* (Falcon Press, London, 1948); *Cape Standard*, 20 January 1942.
- ¹⁴⁶ La Guma, *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 213, 214, 218, 222 (*New Age*, 31 August 1961, 5 October 1961, 9 December 1961, 25 April 1962); emphasis added.
- ¹⁴⁷ La Guma, in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 64, 221.

- ¹⁴⁸ *New Age*, 10 May 1962.
- ¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵⁰ La Guma, in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 221.
- ¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 222.
- ¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 222.
- ¹⁵³ T. Bell, *Unfinished Business: South Africa, Apartheid and Truth* (Redworks/UOP, Cape Town, 2001), p. 18.
- ¹⁵⁴ *New Age*, 21 June 1962.
- ¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵⁶ *The Post*, 3 June 1962.
- ¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵⁸ *New Age*, 9 August 1962.
- ¹⁵⁹ La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 3, 21, 31, 34, 39, 45, 45, 46, 51, 71.
- ¹⁶⁰ W. Carpenter, "'Ovals, Spheres, Ellipses, and Sundry Bulges': Alex La Guma Imagines the Human Body', *Research in African Literatures*, 22, 4 (1992), p. 81.
- ¹⁶¹ La Guma, A., *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 1, 15, 43, 49, 75.
- ¹⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 28.
- ¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. viii.
- ¹⁶⁴ K. Balutansky, *The Novels of Alex La Guma*, p. 22; B. Chandramohan, *A Study in Trans-Ethnicity*, pp. 81, 129.
- ¹⁶⁵ J.M. Coetzee, 'Man's Fate in the Novels of Alex la Guma', p. 360.
- ¹⁶⁶ A. M Astrachan, 'Review of *A Walk in the Night*', *Black Orpheus*, 14 (1959), p. 14; B. Lindfors, 'Form and Technique in the Novels of Richard Rive and Alex la Guma', *Journal of New African Literature and Arts*, 1, 2 (Fall 1966), p. 16.
- ¹⁶⁷ La Guma, quoted in C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. 49.
- ¹⁶⁸ T. Couzens, 'The Black Press and Black Literature in South Africa 1900-1950', *English Studies in Africa*, XIX, 2 (1976).
- ¹⁶⁹ G. Cornwell, 'Protest in fiction', p. 42.
- ¹⁷⁰ C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. 48.
- ¹⁷¹ B. Chandramohan, *A Study in Trans-Ethnicity*, p. 77; J. Mkhize, 'Social Realism in Alex la Guma's Longer Fiction', p. 79.
- ¹⁷² C. Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, p. 21.
- ¹⁷³ La Guma, quoted in C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. 48.
- ¹⁷⁴ *The Cape Standard*, 4 June 1940, 20 August 1940.
- ¹⁷⁵ La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 7,8; *The Sun*, 9 March 1947.
- ¹⁷⁶ *Cape Standard*, 16 July 1940.
- ¹⁷⁷ *The Sun*, 17 February 1948; La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, p. 10.
- ¹⁷⁸ W. Carpenter, 'The Scene of Representation', p. 3.
- ¹⁷⁹ *Cape Standard*, 15 February 1944, 2 November 1943.
- ¹⁸⁰ La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 21, 26, 39.
- ¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 21, 24, 30, 33, 39, 91.
- ¹⁸² H. Barratt, 'South Africa's Dark Night: Metaphor and Symbol in La Guma's Fiction', *The Literary Griot: International Journal of Black Oral and Literary Studies*, 3, 2 (1991), pp. 28-29.
- ¹⁸³ La Guma, 'Why I Joined the Communist Party', pp. 56-61.
- ¹⁸⁴ N. Ngcelwane, *Sala Kahle District Six*, p. 18.
- ¹⁸⁵ J. Matthews, R. Rive, P. Clarke, 'Willy-Boy!', *Drum* (April 1954), pp. 50-55.
- ¹⁸⁶ B. la Guma, interview by B. Chandramohan, p. 198.
- ¹⁸⁷ D. Rabkin, 'Drum Magazine 1951-1961 and the works of Black South African Writers associated with it' (Leeds University, Ph.D. thesis, 1975), p. 180.
- ¹⁸⁸ P. Clarke, interview, 26 October 1996.
- ¹⁸⁹ J. Matthews, ['The Downfall'], 'Willy-Boy!', p. 50; La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, p. 3.
- ¹⁹⁰ La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, pp 50-57; R. Rive, ['They That Mourn'], 'Willy-Boy!', p. 55.

- ¹⁹¹ P. Clarke ['The Delinquent'], 'Willy-Boy!', pp 50-55; La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 89-94.
- ¹⁹² La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 26, 71, 39.
- ¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 28.
- ¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50.
- ¹⁹⁵ L. Nkosi, quoted in K. M. Balutansky, *The Novels of Alex La Guma*, p. 14.
- ¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- ¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- ¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 78.
- ¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.
- ²⁰⁰ A.R. JanMohamed, 'Alex La Guma: the Literary and Political Functions of Marginality in the Colonial Situation', *Boundary-2: A Journal of Postmodern Literature and Culture*, 11: 1-2, 1982-1983, p. 74; La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, p. 74.
- ²⁰¹ La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 20, 77.
- ²⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 72, 34.
- ²⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 8, 53.
- ²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- ²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 16, 44, 53.
- ²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.
- ²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- ²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- ²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-20; K. Balutansky, *The Novels of Alex La Guma*, p. 23.
- ²¹⁰ La Guion Chabalala, pp. 170-172.
- ²¹¹ L.H. Iyer, 'African Views of the United States', pp. 123-124.
- ²¹² *New Age*, 9 August 1962
- ²¹³ A.R. JanMohamed, 'Alex La Guma: The Literary and Political functions of Marginality', p. 75.
- ²¹⁴ M. Adhikari, "'I'm not black'" and "What's my white got to do with it?": An Insider's Reading of Alex la Guma's *A Walk in the Night and Other Stories*, paper presented at La Guma Colloquium, University of the Western Cape, December 1995, p. 16.
- ²¹⁵ M. Adhikari, p. 6.
- ²¹⁶ La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, p.44.
- ²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 27.
- ²¹⁸ La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, p. 4; see *The South African Pocket Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1994) and *A Dictionary of South African English* (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1991).
- ²¹⁹ *The Sun*, 4 March 1938.
- ²²⁰ La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 9, 36-37, 95-96.
- ²²¹ G. Cornwell, 'Protest in fiction', pp. 101, 102.
- ²²² J. Mkhize, 'Social Realism in Alex la Guma's Longer Fiction', pp. 34, 79, 36.
- ²²³ K. Balutansky, *The Novels of Alex La Guma*, p. 14.
- ²²⁴ La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 1, 7, 11.
- ²²⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 11, 25, 64.
- ²²⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 20, 45.
- ²²⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 46, 58.
- ²²⁸ J. Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle* (New English Library, London, 1973), p. 217.
- ²²⁹ W. Carpenter, 'The Scene of Representation', pp. 1-2.
- ²³⁰ La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 9, 16, 95.
- ²³¹ This surging motion has much in common with the crowd's revolutionary mood in *Les Miserables*, where Hugo writes that 'the voice of the people could be heard giving utterance to a dull roar'; V. Hugo, *Les Miserables*, trans. I. Hapgood (Collins, London, 1962) p. 1055
- ²³² La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 41, 82, 86.
- ²³³ *Ibid.* pp. 86-87.
- ²³⁴ W. Carpenter, 'The Scene of Representation', p. 3.

²³⁵ La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, p. 20.

²³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 48.

²³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 94.

²³⁸ J. Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*, p. 294.

²³⁹ S.R. Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions: the Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1983), p. 148.

Chapter Six

The clouds, pregnant with moisture

During the early 1960s the National Party set out to destroy all organisations outside of parliament that posed a serious threat to its policies. In 1963 it passed legislation that empowered the police to arrest without charge, detain and interrogate for 90 days anyone regarded as a threat to the state, and September that year saw the first officially acknowledged death of a 90-day detainee.¹ Already confined to the magisterial districts of Cape Town and Wynberg, in December 1962 La Guma was placed under twenty-four hour house arrest for a five-year period.² In literary terms the early 1960s were La Guma's most productive years. I will argue that in this time two American writers, Steinbeck and Hemingway, made a significant impact on his work. The other factor that affected his writing was the apartheid state. Police raids, detention without trial, house arrest and banning precipitated considerable emotional and psychological strain. By May 1964 La Guma had written 13 short stories, and a biography of his father, and he looked forward to the publication that year of *And a Threefold Cord*. He also planned to work on a history of coloured politics, but shelved the idea because he could not visit libraries.³ In October 1963 the security police raided the La Guma home. They detained Blanche and Alex.⁴ Blanche remembers that

...the day they arrested both of us...I was on my morning nursing, and when I came back there was this huge lorry...and another car and another small van...and the place crawling with Special Branch...they just took out bags full of books, all Lenin went everything went, my midwifery books went...my ANC register – antenatal clinic....⁵

Alex and Blanche were held at Maitland police station. The security police claimed that La Guma had written a document and that Blanche was the courier. With

several security policemen interrogating her she refused to answer questions or implicate herself and was detained without trial.⁶ During this time the couple discovered that they were held in the same station and they

...sang to each other. We sang light opera – *La Boheme* – and I was Mimi.... It kept us going...and I got his response, and then I knew Alex was in the same prison...and then I remember on the 27th of November I sung the *Internationale*...and I heard his response.⁷

Blanche was detained for 15 days while Alex was held in solitary confinement under the General Law Further Amendment Act. On 8 November he was charged under the Suppression of Communism Act. He appeared in court on 6 December and was remanded to 8 January 1964. During that time he was held as an awaiting trial prisoner.⁸ The children, who returned from school to an empty house, were severely traumatised by the sudden departure of their parents. In February Blanche received a five-year banning order. Her detention and banning also affected the family's income. Her husband could not collect his unemployment benefit from the Department of Labour, and now many of the mothers whose babies she had arranged to deliver found other midwives because there was no indication how long she would be held or, if released, when she might be detained again. Once more, just as it had done during the 1960 State of Emergency, the Black Sash provided the La Gumas with material support – this time in the form of money to pay rent and utility bills.⁹

A permanent period of reconstruction

During the early 1960s Beier and Mphahlele corresponded with La Guma about his fiction. Writing from Ibadan in 1962 or 1963, Beier confirmed receipt of a letter in which La Guma told him that he was 'doing quite a bit of writing again'.¹⁰ Mbari press and *Black Orpheus* were not the only outlets available to La Guma at that time. Seven Seas publishing house in the former German Democratic Republic

approached La Guma, and he offered them the manuscript of *And a Threefold Cord*. According to Cecil Abrahams, La Guma wrote part of *And a Threefold Cord* during 1963 while detained without trial in Roeland Street Jail for five months. La Guma had been detained ostensibly because he was furthering the aims of a banned organisation.¹¹ Abrahams is correct in saying that La Guma wrote *And a Threefold Cord* under oppressive conditions, but his account begs several questions. He completed *And a Threefold Cord* after he was banned, so we can assume that he knew that its South African readership would be negligible. Thus, unlike *A Walk in the Night* it has a glossary of vernacular terms for non-South African readers. However, this does not tell us whether he started writing the novel in jail or whether he completed it in jail. Nor does it tell us about the conditions under which he wrote the novel – for instance, whether he wrote it in solitary confinement or whether he had access to other literature while in jail. Prison regulations governing the treatment of detainees did permit business visits from a legal representative, and detainees had access to ‘approved literature’.¹² These are important questions – not raised to diminish the injustice of detention without trial but to explore more fully the conditions under which he wrote the novel and to trace its origins. Nor should we exaggerate the political or literary significance of his contract with Seven Seas. That the publishing house approached La Guma is an indication of his literary reputation and profile, but he was not their first writer from South Africa or Cape Town. In 1963, Seven Seas had brought out *African Songs*, an anthology of Richard Rive’s short stories.¹³ Abrahams’ time frame seems credible if we consider how long it took Seven Seas to publish Rive’s anthology. Rive began correspondence and negotiations with them in 1962 – a full year before *African Songs* appeared.¹⁴

La Guma drew on a wide variety of sources for *And a Threefold Cord*, and unless he had access to all of them while in jail it is unlikely that he wrote more than a small part of the whole novel there. At least one press report confirms that he was writing his second novel at the time he was placed under twenty-four hour house arrest in December 1962, i.e. before the period of detention without trial mentioned by Abrahams.¹⁵ The slow pace at which he wrote provides some support for this

view. According to Blanche, La Guma did not start the novel straight after *A Walk in the Night*. Rather,

[he] would start something and then put it down for a while and then pick it up again, and maybe tear up all that lot. He wasn't secretive, but he thought of [it] into his own head.... Then he gets a mood and he sits typing right through the night.¹⁶

All this makes it harder to discount the possibility that *And a Threefold Cord* had reached an advanced stage by the time La Guma was detained, that he signed the contract and made minor changes while in jail, and that the production process took about one year. In May 1964 the *Post* reported that 'this year will see the publication of his second major work, called "And a Threefold Cord". It is about love and life in the pondokkie [shack] settlements around Cape Town.'¹⁷

La Guma has left us with several reasons for writing *And a Threefold Cord*. He wanted to document the conditions of shack dwellers for posterity and/or for a non-South African audience: '...it was a matter of recording history or recording [a] situation'.¹⁸ Here he assumes that knowledge about the situation should be preserved for the future, because 'the picture of suburban slums did not appear anywhere in South African writing'.¹⁹ By design or default La Guma implies that works by predecessors such as the 'Drum generation', Peter Abrahams in *Mine Boy* or *Tell Freedom* or Cape Town contemporaries such as Richard Rive, James Matthews or Peter Clarke were inadequate representations. For La Guma the slum was 'part of our life, our scene so it should appear in the picture'.²⁰ Mkhize feels that here La Guma sees himself presenting 'individual "pictures" of [the] South African "totality"'.²¹ La Guma also wanted to show that the image of South Africa presented to international tourists differed radically from the reality experienced by most South Africans. If publicity showed South Africa as "'a country with perfect weather'" – the depoliticised 'Sunny South Africa' of international tourist brochures – then descriptions of the weather should have a "'symbolic potential'" that would

expose the oppression and poverty experienced by the majority of South Africans.²² I will expand on this issue later.

When La Guma wrote *A Walk in the Night* he inserted identifiable District Six internal markers such as Castle Bridge, Hanover Street, Chapel Street and the Seven Steps into the story. By contrast, he designated the setting of *And a Threefold Cord* by stressing its boundaries – ‘the long road pushing north’, ‘the wide-curving metal of railway lines’, ‘the blank industrial areas’, the ‘rubbish dump with its patrol of flies’, ‘the suburb proper’, the cemetery – several of which defined the parameters of Windermere, an informal shack settlement inhabited by a mixture of coloured and African families.²³ In other words, his sense of what was significant about his settings shifted from a stress on their internal features to their boundaries or margins. According to Western, Windermere was a

... notoriously squalid shantytown... where both Coloureds and Black Africans lived in tin *pondoks*... The area adjoins White space only for a one-and-a-half block stretch... and even there a small border strip has been carefully inserted. Elsewhere, it is separated from White areas to the northwest and the north by a new suburban railway line, a freeway... to the east by open ground... and then by an arterial road; to the south by industry, the main railway line, a major highway, and cemeteries....²⁴

What Balutansky calls an ‘effective battery of spatial barriers’ around Windermere indicated the lengths to which apartheid urban planners were prepared to go in their determination to separate designated racial groups.²⁵ Within the domain of apartheid thinking, Windermere was a problem because of its proximity to ‘white’ settlement, and because from the late 1930s it had been a community of mixed ‘others’.

By the time La Guma wrote *And a Threefold Cord*, Windermere’s status as a deprived and waterlogged slum was well established. In 1939 the National Liberation League had championed the cause of Africans living there and the *Cape*

Standard had published photographs of its flooded streets.²⁶ 'Windy Windermere' quagmires, the absence of infrastructure and the misery and poverty of its inhabitants characterised reportage in the paper during the early 1940s.²⁷ By the middle of that decade description had shifted towards an association between the area and the system which had given rise to it. In a manner common to Jack London's *People of the Abyss* and La Guma's *A Walk in the Night*, these reports registered disgust at the area and disgust at the conditions that had created it: '[s]qualor, misery, disease and vice have come to be looked upon as inseparable from Windermere.... But Windermere is merely an excrescence of the rotten system of South Africa. It is a running sore which can only be cured effectively by tackling the disease at its roots'.²⁸ During mid-1945, there were indications that it would be declared a slum and cleared, but in the following year there were reports of 'hovels in which three or four families live...surrounded by water during the winter seasons' and 'appalling conditions of intense poverty, malnutrition, [and] the curse of strong drink'. Further, despite 'all the water around them...these people have to pay ½d per bucket for drinking water'.²⁹ Reports from this period also confirmed that Africans arriving in the Western Cape often left the train before it reached Cape Town. They chose to live in Windermere in order to evade the conditions of 'Proclamation 105 of 1939 [that] Africans entering the closed area of Cape Town must have work to go to'.³⁰ Racially mixed communities were an anathema to the apartheid authorities, and in 1958 Cook's Bush was destroyed.³¹ That year Windermere was under serious threat, and by 1963 it too had been demolished.³² Just as he had done with *A Walk in the Night*, La Guma set his novel of suburban slums in an area that faced destruction.

In 1957 La Guma had reported for *New Age* on the destruction of 'illegal' African dwellings in Windermere. He wrote of officials who refused to acknowledge African family units and classified women as 'reputed wives who should return to the reserves'. In *And a Threefold Cord* this finds its echo in the callous manner in which the police demand an African couple's "'permit to love in this area'". They call a woman a "'[b]lerry black whore'" because she and the man with whom she is

sleeping do not share the same surname.³³ That year La Guma also provided a graphic description of the pondokkie-dweller's life in winter:

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....

...a pondokkie burnt down the other night. The ever-present brazier in the refrigerator-cold shanty was the cause of the fire...By nightfall another pondokkie had been erected in its place. 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.

One night another fire may start, or perhaps a storm will come up, and the rickety 'building' will be destroyed once more...The life of the pondokkie-dweller is a permanent 'period of reconstruction'.³⁴

Several elements of this article – the threats posed by fire, wind and rain and the description of the reconstructed pondokkie – reappear in the pages of *And a Threefold Cord* and are pictured on the cover of its first edition. According to a much later autobiographical piece, during his childhood the houses of District Six were also in a poor state. In the winter months after it had rained for several days he would see people on the roofs 'moving about, plugging leaks and patching holes'.³⁵ This too would feature in this novel – trapping the inhabitants of the settlement between the weather, their poverty and the selective indifference of property owners and the state.

La Guma's second longer prose work covers approximately 36 hours in the life of the Pauls family, which lives in a creaking shack that just manages to withstand the onslaught of a Cape winter's rain and wind. The central character is Charlie

Pauls, an erratically employed coloured ex-soldier. Charlie lives in the shack with his mother Ma (who does her best to control the family and keep it intact), his dying father, his troubled younger brother Ronny, who is the only family member currently with a job, and his youngest brother Jorny who continually plays truant. His adolescent and heavily pregnant sister Caroline and her husband Alf live next to them in a shack made out of a wooden container that previously held an American car. Uncle Ben, Ma's alcoholic brother, lives nearby in the settlement. At the start of the novel, which coincides with the onset of the Cape winter, Charlie wakes up to discover a leak in the roof of their shack. His efforts to repair it take him on a walk through the settlement that facilitates contact with non-family members. Charlie fights with and knocks out Roman, a local alcoholic thug who regards the apparently promiscuous but vacuous Susie Meyer as his property. Roman cannot tolerate competition from Ronny who also regards Susie Meyer as his property. Charlie re-establishes his relationship with Freda, a widow with two children. She tends to his cuts and bruises after the fight. Charlie invites George Mostert, a lonely white garage owner from whom he cadges a piece of corrugated iron to patch up the family home, to join him and other settlement residents for 'a good time'.

After fixing the roof, Charlie and Uncle Ben discuss the causes of individual and social unhappiness and injustice over a drink. Charlie refers to a '*slim burg*' [clever or intelligent man] whom he recently met while laying pipes.³⁶ This man introduced Charlie to ideas about community, collective action and solidarity, and in the novel *La Guma* uses these to lay the basis for thoughts about socialism. Charlie has sufficient understanding of these principles to apply them to his own environment, to compare his living conditions with those of Freda's employers, and to criticise Uncle Ben's and Ma's religious fatalism. Pa's death and funeral unite African and coloured residents in the form of Missus Nzuba, the priest Brother Bombata and the Pauls family. On a rainy night after the funeral Mostert takes up Charlie's invitation but Susie Meyer's persistence frightens him off and he retreats to his garage. Ronny sees Susie with Mostert and later kills her. The police, who are raiding the settlement for Africans living illegally in the Western Cape, arrest Ronny. Simultaneously, Charlie

knocks down a policeman but manages to escape arrest. At the same time his sister Caroline gives birth. The delivery also brings together African and coloured residents – again in the form of Missus Nzuba and Ma. After the rain and the raid, Freda locks her children in her shack to keep them safe and warm while she goes to the shops, but they burn to death when her Primus cooker overturns. Earlier Charlie had undertaken to repair it. At the end of the novel Charlie reasserts his commitment to socially conscious and altruistic values and to the institution of the family by confirming his intention to marry Freda. Three significant elements of the story are the ‘reconstruction’ of the shack, the ‘reconstruction’ of Charlie’s political views and the ‘reconstruction’ of the family precipitated by Pa’s death, Ronny’s arrest, the delivery of Caroline’s baby and the imminent marriage of Charlie and Freda.

We have seen that La Guma could draw on a wealth of readily available impressions and detail about the area, but these were not his only sources. While local coverage dating from the late 1930s and his own writing offered political analysis of the setting of the story, the effects of influx control and details about the external appearances of the pondokkies, he relied on his wife for details about their interiors. ‘A child is born’, a piece based on Blanche la Guma’s experiences as a midwife to Cape Flats shack dwellers but written by her husband, provided important material that contributed to the work’s sense of veracity and its atmosphere.³⁷ In this article Blanche describes two deliveries that occurred in leaking shacks during a heavy downpour—the setting for Caroline’s delivery in the novel. They also share features with one of his literary influences – an issue that I will deal with later.³⁸ In one instance

Mrs. J. had her eighth baby on the bare springs of a rickety single bed in a tiny room in a ruined house at 2 a.m. Outside it was pouring and the rain came through the gaping roof. She had an old jigger coat and a two-foot-wide strip of ragged, dirty blanket over her, and if she wanted it to cover her adequately, she had to straighten out completely. Her other seven

children huddled in a corner under an old coat because the rest of the house had no roof.³⁹

Another delivery took place in a structure like 'a chicken coop'. This formed part of La Guma's description of Roman's shack that he described as 'an amalgamation of a kennel, a chicken-coop and a lean-to shed'.⁴⁰ The delivery of Mrs. M., the wife of an African preacher, 'took place at five minutes past eleven on a rainy night and the rain poured through holes in the tin roof. The only candle went out under a deluge at the most critical time and I had to work in the dark until Mr. M. could find another candle. In the cramped space my uniform caught alight.' Just as they did in *And a Threefold Cord* when Freda's shack caught fire and her children burnt to death, Blanche's experiences showed that fire and rain were not incompatible dangers in this environment.

No, I don't think there was any specific writer

The argument that La Guma's novels are linked by the evolution of progressively higher degrees of political consciousness and organisation among its individual and collective protagonists and their actions is well established. Several of those who have advanced this argument – Coetzee, Roscoe, Moore and JanMohamed – have pointed out that while the level of political and ideological awareness among the protagonists of his novels may change, La Guma continued to write in the same way. The short story remained his preferred form, and he was strongly influenced by naturalism.⁴¹ The argument that in La Guma's work literary form remained static while the political consciousness of certain characters changed requires modification. In this chapter I will argue that while some of the short stories he wrote at this time could be described as naturalist, others have modernist aspects, and that *And a Threefold Cord* drew on at least one significant non-naturalist source.

Carpenter sees in La Guma's *oeuvre* 'a deepening interrogation of the communal "scene of representation"', but feels that in the process La Guma changes from being a 'spontaneous romantic naturalist' to a 'dedicated sacramental

allegorist'.⁴² For Mkhize, however, 'the road to consciousness' in La Guma's work begins with *And a Threefold Cord*. Mkhize seeks to show that in this work La Guma is a 'critical realist' in the Lukácsian sense.⁴³ He disputes the idea that La Guma was drawn to naturalism. He argues that in this novel La Guma 'rejects the "fatalism" that is associated with naturalism not only in its characterisation' – here Mkhize has in mind Charlie Pauls – 'but also in its symbolism'—and here Mkhize refers to the carnation growing in the rubbish dump on which the children play.⁴⁴ For Mkhize, *And a Threefold Cord* represents a first step on the 'road to consciousness'. Unlike *A Walk in the Night*, it has a central protagonist who is 'typical' in the Lukácsian sense, and who articulates and tries to act upon the ideas of collective action and solidarity to which he has recently been exposed.⁴⁵

There are interpretative and methodological grounds for contesting Mkhize's analysis. La Guma's first two long prose works have several common features. Neither work has a strong plot. Firstly, in the case of *A Walk in the Night*, coincidence plays a large part, while in *And a Threefold Cord* Charlie's efforts to keep the pondokkie waterproof and the expressions of the need for unity and co-operation are its organising principles. Secondly, characterisation is similar. In both, most characters have little or no understanding of the social forces that keep them poor, unemployed and the victims of racism and economic exploitation. Those who grope towards some deeper knowledge have limited understanding of the information and insights they have acquired. In *A Walk in the Night*, the taxi driver struggles to understand and articulate the ideas he heard at a political meeting. So too in *And a Threefold Cord*, where Charlie muses over and tries to implement some of the ideas that he heard from the 'slim burg' but displays no indication that he will translate them into political activity. In both works scenes of collective action complement the thoughts of the more progressive and politically aware characters. In *A Walk in the Night*, this takes the form of opposition to 'the law' and the exploration of coloured attitudes towards whites and Africans. In *And a Threefold Cord*, we see it in practical demonstrations of solidarity, support and co-operation among coloureds and Africans, while whites such as Mostert remain alienated and

isolated by 'wretched pride in a false racial superiority'.⁴⁶ Thirdly, if we read La Guma's texts as the expression of a desire for progressively higher levels of collective or class political consciousness and action against the apartheid state, then pursued to its logical conclusion *A Walk in the Night* might seem more 'advanced'. Coetzee argues that the novel lacks a central protagonist and accords the collective response to racial injustice and lack of rights a far more important place.⁴⁷ Coetzee's is a minority view. Despite disagreements about whether La Guma wrote within a naturalist or realist literary and political tradition, the range of criticism surveyed indicates basic agreement that the chronological sequence of La Guma's longer prose works conforms to a developmental and teleological analysis. Dr Drawing on La Gum 1977 article, 'What I Learned from Maxim Gorky', Chandramohan and Mkhize argue that Gorky's literary and political influence on La Guma is discernible as early as 'A Christmas Story', and affected his first two major prose works.⁴⁸ Fourthly, then, the problem is not that Chandramohan and Mkhize use a more recent utterance to interpret an earlier one, but that they do so without considering the context within which La Guma expressed his debt to Gorky.

Critical reception during the 1960s of one of La Guma's literary influences indicates why we need to consider the context of a statement about preferred influences. At this time, Hemingway's reception in the Soviet Union presented his work as part of the development of literature through a series of stages culminating in socialist realism. Described by Soviet critics as "'the most American among all American writers'", Hemingway's novels were popular in the Soviet Union during the 1960s, when several appeared in translation.⁴⁹ Hemingway's reception in the Soviet Union highlighted his experience as a journalist, stressed that he learned from European realists, was "'strongly impressed by Russian writers'", and "'regarded Turgenev, Chekov, Leo Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky as his teachers'".⁵⁰ Clearly this critical 'lineage' differs from that which many 'western' critics – with their emphases on modernists such as Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald, James Joyce and Ezra Pound – have tended to explore.⁵¹ There are similar differences of critical opinion in La Guma's case. In 1971, Klima accepted the validity of a search 'for parallels

between contemporary South African literature and Russian pre-Revolution writing'.⁵² Three years later, Coetzee felt that the 'obvious influences on his style [were] American: the popular crime and low-life story, with behind it the naturalism of James Farrell and Richard Wright, and, further back, the protest novel of Upton Sinclair'.⁵³ Clearly time, place and political considerations can influence the way in which critics write the history of influences on a writer.

By the time his Gorky article appeared in *Lotus*, several of La Guma's works had been translated into Russian, and his works had become texts that represented South Africa to readers in the Soviet Union and elsewhere. While the capacity of La Guma's works to communicate significant aspects of life in South Africa at that time is not in doubt, his works would not have been disseminated and popularised in the Soviet Union without official approval. In La Guma's case this approval would have been relatively straightforward due to his strong support for the Soviet Union, his membership of the SACP – borne out by his autobiographical articles in *The African Communist* – both of which appeared under the journal's regular item 'Why I joined the Communist Party – his visits to the Soviet Union and his links with the Soviet Writers' Union. Under these circumstances, La Guma would have been more open to the possibility that Gorky influenced his own aesthetic. This would have been the case whether La Guma made this connection in the interests of the Soviet Union and socialist realism, or to stress his own proximity to Gorky as a literary and political 'father figure'.

While none of these claims invalidates La Guma's commitment to historical and dialectical materialism, they bring into question how La Guma and his critics have constituted his work and its influences, and how this in turn might influence subsequent researchers and critics. There is no reason to doubt La Guma's claim that Gorky influenced him, but at this stage we do not have to assume that the influence was exclusive, direct or conscious or that La Guma had no style of his own. Taking its point of departure from Carpenter's and Balutansky's observations that in *And a Threefold Cord* La Guma 'interpolates short episodes of the life of the people into the main narrative' and that 'these interpolations, interwoven with

symbolic patterns, enhance and transform social history into story', my argument here is that in part *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck, who received the Nobel Prize for literature at the time La Guma worked on *And a Threefold Cord*, provided La Guma with a literary and political framework for his novel about 'permanent reconstruction'.⁵⁴

We have already seen in Chapter Three that during the late 1940s among La Guma's contemporaries you were considered 'uneducated if you hadn't read *The Grapes of Wrath* or *For Whom the Bell Tolls*'.⁵⁵ John Ford's film adaptation of the former was well received by *The Guardian*, and had its South African premiere in May 1941.⁵⁶ Whether or not he drew on the film to visualise scenes in *Time of the Butcherbird*, the style, content and structure of *The Grapes of Wrath* is undeniably present in La Guma's novel about an economically marginalised family in a South African 'Hooverville'.

La Guma *has* acknowledged Steinbeck's influence, but in an ambivalent manner. Discussing the impact of various writers in an interview with Abrahams published in 1991, he said that

Tolstoy did not influence me because I read his books and that's it. I cannot say that in such a time Tolstoy made such an impression on me that I wanted to imitate him or be like him. No, I don't think there was any specific writer. I think I turned towards socially conscious writers in general. There were times when Steinbeck produced works which were related to things [in] which I was interested in terms of social problems and so on. So there were other writers and from this point of view of course one can say why not one more than the other, but to say that any particular school of writing I went through made some impression – no. It is quite possible, but I can't myself say which one of them was the most influential.⁵⁷

Most writers would not wish to be seen as imitators or for their work to be described as derivative, and we can understand La Guma's reluctance to be drawn on this issue. Allied to this is the possibility that as La Guma's literary stature and the interest of critics grew, so their questions about the texts or writers who influenced him became more frequent, and that his desire to produce a personal and literary autobiography that stressed his own originality evolved accordingly. La Guma's literary self-construction has hints of what Pletsch has called an 'autobiographical life' – a type of autobiography in which 'the biographic subject is a great writer whose lifework has been to produce an elaborate and finished fiction or myth of himself'.⁵⁸ Even if we discount this extreme case, Abrahams' interviews, La Guma's articles on his literary influences, and his pieces on the relationship between culture, liberation and politics must have heightened his sense that he and his works were objects of enquiry. In turn this must have precipitated a desire to establish strategic distances and proximities between himself and certain writers such as London, Tolstoy, Steinbeck, Gorky or Hemingway.⁵⁹

It is clear from the long quotation above that though La Guma shifts the issue from particular writers to a 'particular school of writing', he identified with Steinbeck because they shared an interest in 'social problems'. Secondly, the fact that he considers Tolstoy and Steinbeck together suggests that he constructed the story of his literary interests and influences along lines similar to those produced for Hemingway in the Soviet Union. Thirdly, since La Guma subscribed to a developmental model of literary and cultural production – implicit in the way in which he describes his own reading history and his debt to Gorky – it is likely that he would wish to minimise his debt to writers in the Soviet literary canon such as L.N. Tolstoy who were perceived as politically limited. According to Jünger, 'from the viewpoint of "official" criticism oriented towards the school of socialist realism', Tolstoy stressed 'non-violent opposition to evil...total forgiveness, and...moral self-improvement of the individual by an unselfish love of his fellow men'. Tolstoy claimed for himself the right to represent the peasantry but could not 'comprehend the worldwide historical role of the working class'.⁶⁰ All this would have made him

a problematic literary and political model. La Guma's link between Tolstoy and Steinbeck – both of whom advocated peasant-oriented solutions to the problem of land distribution – implies the presence of a 'debt' that had implications for the literary and political trajectory on which he wished to place himself. We now turn to the content of this debt.

The representation of several 'social problems' and their solutions in *And a Threefold Cord* draws on *The Grapes of Wrath*, and we can get a good sense of this debt by comparing passages from the two novels. Towards the end of Steinbeck's novel, after he has killed a union-busting vigilante and gone into hiding, Tom Joad tells Ma about "some Scripture" that he heard from Casy.⁶¹ He then recites the passage from *Ecclesiastes* that La Guma used as the epigraph for his own novel. Before and after this recitation, Tom tells Ma about Casy's ideas and adds some of his own. Casy told him that "his little piece of a soul wasn't no good 'less it was with the rest, an' was whole". In La Guma's novel, Charlie Pauls repeats what he heard from the "*slim burg*" who said that "people can't stand up to the world alone, they got to be together", and the narrator's criticisms of George Mostert's self-imposed isolation make a similar point.⁶² After the recitation, Tom criticises passive and fatalistic religious beliefs according to which "the poor we shall have always with us, an' if you got nothin', why, jus' fol' your hands an' to hell with it, you gonna git ice cream on gol' plates when you're dead". This corresponds to Charlie's criticism of Uncle Ben's and Ma's passive religious fatalism. Charlie asks, "who works out how much weight each person got to carry?"

Tom Joad also criticises an economic and political system that permits one person to have "a million acres, while a hunderd thousan' good farmers is starvin'" and recalls the government-run Weedpatch camp where "folks took care a theirselves".⁶³ Tom's solution is for the poor to organise themselves. In this way they confront the causes of their exploitation and oppression, and have a chance to remove them. This corresponds to elements of the discussion between Charlie Pauls and Uncle Ben over a couple of bottles of wine, and to parts of the family supper later that night.⁶⁴ On both occasions Charlie mentions the '*slim burg*' who said that

“the poor don’t have to be poor”, because if they “got together and took everything in the whole blerry world, there wouldn’t be poor no more” and proposes that “poor people ought to form a union”.⁶⁵

La Guma need not have used the *Ecclesiastes* quotation as an epigraph. By doing so, consciously or unconsciously he signalled a debt to Steinbeck that went beyond concern for ‘social problems’. The debt indicates that La Guma’s record of “permanent reconstruction” had a fictional dimension. It was the reconstruction of an already available fictional representation. It also undermines La Guma’s claim that Steinbeck did not influence the way he wrote and thought about social issues. This has implications for the way in which we understand how La Guma’s thinking about the representation of politics and political forces in literature changed. It suggests that from relatively early in his writing career he was open to and drew on non-naturalistic forms of representation and narrative, but without discarding the tendency to describe individuals in the type of detail he had used in journalism and *A Walk in the Night*. This challenges the view that La Guma was primarily a naturalist, or that *And a Threefold Cord* is the start of his socialist realism. It also suggests that he was still wrestling with the problem – staged in his novella – of how to represent the transition from individual experiences of oppression to collective action, and that he was drawn to symbolic expressions of the relationship between political consciousness and society in order to resolve the problem. La Guma’s own limitations as a novelist and his psychological state at the time – a factor I will explore later on – led him to assert that emotional bonds were as important as class interests. In *And a Threefold Cord* he proposes solutions which Steinbeck, who criticised communism because he regarded it as an inflexible social system, would have rejected.

At times, La Guma’s characterisation and its links with particular events show Steinbeck’s influence. We can draw parallels between Rose of Sharon and Connie in *The Grapes of Wrath* and Caroline and Alfred in *And a Threefold Cord*. Connie ‘was a good hard worker and would make a good husband’ while Alfred ‘was a hard worker, and a good husband’, and both were struggling to take on board the

implications of the changes in their wives and their own lives as fatherhood and parental responsibility approached.⁶⁶ In this regard they are different. While the impossibilities of Connie's and Rose of Sharon's dreams of a better life in California caused Connie to desert his wife, Alfred stays with Caroline despite the realisation that they did not qualify for council housing.⁶⁷ There are also similarities in the birthing scenes. Steinbeck writes that the air in the box-car was 'fetid and close with the smell of birth'; La Guma writes that in the car crate the 'smell of smoke and oil and birth made the air fetid'.⁶⁸ Even the spelling suggests a debt to Steinbeck, for La Guma has used the American 'fetid' rather than the English 'foetid'. Both Rose of Sharon and Caroline give birth during a period of prolonged rain in dirty conditions – Rose of Sharon in the box-car and Caroline in a motor car crate. Both deliveries expose the limitations of purely family-based allegiances and create the conditions for a larger, stronger sense of community in which the distinction between 'family' and 'other' is blurred.⁶⁹ This also applies to the deaths of Grampa in *The Grapes of Wrath* and Pa in *And a Threefold Cord*.⁷⁰ Grampa's death brings together the Joads and the Wilsons. He dies in the latter's tent and they bury him in the their quilt.⁷¹ Steinbeck writes that after Grampa's death the Joad family 'became a unit'.⁷² At the same time, his death strengthens bonds between families and creates the conditions for a reassuring collective identity. When Ma Joad offers to replace the Wilsons' quilt with one of her own, Sairy Wilson replies that she "shouldn't talk like that". In a phrase which finds its echo in Missus Nzuba's support for Ma after Pa's death, Mrs Wilson says "We're proud to help. I ain't felt so – safe in a long time. People needs – to help", while Missus Nzuba tells Ma, "I'm proud to yelp you."⁷³

There are several instances in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* when Steinbeck expresses his belief in the existence of an overarching and undifferentiated state of being that encompasses and subsumes opposites.⁷⁴ He expresses this also in *The Grapes of Wrath* through the way in which the family remains constant with one member dying and another being born.⁷⁵ We have already seen that Grampa's death facilitates bonds with the Wilsons and later the men in the box-car camp co-operate

to prevent the rising water from flooding out the box-car in which Rose of Sharon is giving birth.⁷⁶ After her stillbirth, Rose of Sharon suckles the old man who is starving because he gave what little food he had to his own son.⁷⁷ In *And a Threefold Cord* two incidents threaten the integrity of the Pauls family – Pa dies and Ronald is arrested after killing Susie Meyer – while two other events – the horrific death of Freda’s children and Caroline’s delivery – create the conditions for its extension and renewal. Pa’s death and Caroline’s delivery draw together coloured and African members of the community, while Ronald’s arrest provides a moral lesson on the need for family and community solidarity and support. Already regarded as part of the family by the time of Pa’s funeral, Charlie brings Freda into the Pauls house after the fire, thereby confirming his commitment to her. However, here there are differences between the two texts. Where social and economic upheaval convert Joad family governance from patriarchy to matriarchy, the opposite happens in *And a Threefold Cord*.⁷⁸ Before the death of Pa, Ma ruled the Pauls household, but Freda’s place in the bed previously shared by Pa and Ma and the description of Ma’s mourning and regressive thoughts suggest that responsibility and control will shift to Charlie and his future wife.⁷⁹

A similar pattern emerges as we explore parallels between George Mostert, the lonely white garage owner, and the garage owner whom the Joad family encounters near Paden on their journey west.⁸⁰ Their living conditions are similar: both are single, and both live in a space that functions as office, store and home.⁸¹ Both are helpless observers of their own economic demise as they establish fleeting contact with the dispossessed who come to their service stations to beg, while the new expensive cars of richer prospective customers sweep past *en route* to the newer, brighter service stations.⁸²

La Guma acknowledges that larger forces prevent some characters from displaying ‘advanced thought’. Like Uncle Doughty in *A Walk in the Night*, both are being ‘destroyed by alcohol and something neither...understood’.⁸³ Mostert lives alone in his glass-walled garage office.⁸⁴ Drawn to the squatter settlement by his need for an experience of community and his sexual desires, he is ‘shocked’ and

'ashamed' at Charlie's reminiscences about his "French goose in Alexandria". He is repelled by the dirt of the squatter camp, and is prevented by his own racism from crossing the spatial and ideological divides created by apartheid. At the same time, the text expresses a degree of sympathy for him. The manner in which La Guma qualifies his description of Mostert's physical, political and emotional position through phrases like 'as if', 'one could hardly consider', 'more like' suggests that Mostert did not actively participate in defining the symbolic and literal position which his garage occupies, and that if he subscribes to a racist ideology he is also a victim of the economic forces that are allied to it.⁸⁵ Two chapters later, La Guma develops the idea of people who are unable to see what oppresses them through the extended metaphor of the fly trapped by the glass pane. Mostert and Uncle Ben cannot see what prevents them from exploring other ways of thinking or living.⁸⁶ La Guma appears to have adapted Steinbeck's material to local conditions, for he shifts the emphasis to issues more closely associated with South Africa – the need for unity and mutual support among those oppressed and marginalised by the combined forces of racism and capitalism.⁸⁷

Among those marginalised by capitalism and racism, the ongoing struggle for shelter - Steinbeck's novel links housing to a range of factors such as the capacity to retain personal dignity and to remain rational and part of society. He describes a Hooverville camp in bleak and naturalistic terms to communicate a 'mood of failure and despair'.⁸⁸ Steinbeck begins by telling his readers that '[t]here was no order in the camp; little grey tents, shacks, cars were scattered about at random'. He describes three dwellings in some detail before the Joads meet the settlement's 'mayor' whose confusion and inability to communicate with others reflects the camp's atmosphere of 'slovenly despair'.⁸⁹ They learn that the mayor is "'bull-simple'" because the "'cops push 'im aroun' so much he's still spinning'".⁹⁰ In this setting Tom Joad learns how the Californian agricultural capitalists have conspired to push down wages by creating an over-supply of labour.⁹¹ It is the economic rationality of the latter that destroys the rationality of the migrants and their capacity to function as social beings.

La Guma was also aware of the links between housing and the factors mentioned above. He too depicts the accommodation of several characters by combining naturalistic detail with affirmative or negative imagery. The most important example is the Pauls house. Built primarily by Pa and Charlie, the materials out of which it was constructed and the support and co-operation with which its components were assembled provide concrete and symbolic proof that 'a threefold cord is not quickly broken'.⁹² The shack has human qualities. The 'house groaned and winced in agony under the whip of the rain, and the floor sagged, but held on' – just as the Pauls family experiences attacks on its integrity but endures and begins to renew itself.⁹³ The only inhabitant of the Pauls shack who does not have human qualities, and who therefore represents an internal threat to its integrity, is Ronny. La Guma says that as a child he had whined 'like a hurt pup'; he ate by 'wolfing down' his breakfast and 'crouched morosely'.⁹⁴ He has more in common with Roman, his rival in the matter of Susie Meyer, than with the Pauls family, for Roman is also a wolf. Relying heavily upon his wife's midwifery experiences, La Guma describes Roman's shack in animal terms.⁹⁵ Similarly, Susie Meyer herself has the 'persistence of a terrier bitch' and 'small, yellow canines, like the fangs of a puppy'. Simultaneously, La Guma draws on image clusters found in his previous works. Deploying some of the imagery of bomb sites and horror films found in 'Etude' and *A Walk in the Night*, he compares Susie Meyer's house to 'the scene from a bombing'; it is as 'dark and ugly as... a haunted house in a movie picture'; its brickwork is like 'raw wounds', and it is 'surrounded by 'hovels... like hyenas waiting to devour it'.⁹⁶

As house and household, the Pauls shack withstands various forms of attack. With the exception of Ronny and Uncle Ben, those associated with this shack can resist the environment's power to suck them down into a literal and symbolic mire. Unlike Roman or Susie Meyer, they do not acquire animal characteristics. Nor do they become like Uncle Ben, 'drunken men in their own regurgitation' who are caught in the 'sucking quagmire of rain-blackened sand'.⁹⁷ That Charlie stands above most of the shack dwellers is suggested by his reasons for fighting Roman and

the way in which he fights. Charlie wants to protect Ronny, and does so by drawing on boxing lessons. In fighting or political struggle knowledge of a technique and the desire to apply it elevates Charlie and makes him human. However, the way in which La Guma attributes animal qualities to characters in this novel has additional and problematic implications.

One of La Guma's main aims in writing *And a Threefold Cord* was to demonstrate the importance and value of solidarity and mutual support among the oppressed. He combined these aims with descriptions of the oppressed that echo concerns in works by *fin de siècle* literary and political figures. These concerns repeat the expressions of disgust at the area and disgust at the conditions that created it, and found in the press during 1945. In his study of *fin de siècle* literary material, Youngs distinguishes three related elements:

...a shuddering recognition of the origins and bestial nature of 'man' with alarm at the possibility of a degenerative adaptation down to one's own (usually urban) environment;...the actual or threatened return of repressed desires and instincts;...the challenge posed to those characters who represent the values of civilised society, [and which] reflects their growing loss of power.⁹⁸

Youngs focuses on 'white apes' such as Tarzan. Transposed to South Africa, and given La Guma's exposure to Jack London, and the presence of 'upward' and 'downward' adaptation ideas in his material on the Coon carnival and his early prison short stories, we can see that in *And a Threefold Cord* La Guma contrasts those who retain their level of adaptation and might adapt 'upwards' with those like Roman who 'had no capacity for any sort of advanced thought' and who therefore adapted 'down'.⁹⁹ Youngs does not describe La Guma's work or environment, but we can use the former's thoughts to understand La Guma's writing about his childhood in District Six. There his family – particularly his father – expressed the political importance of 'downward' identification without a 'degenerative

adaptation' through which one would become like the people one sought to lead and uplift. Expressed in his complementary descriptions of character and environment, we can read the way in which La Guma negotiated the tension between 'downward' identification and 'degenerative adaptation' as a response to the prison setting in which he conceptualised or wrote some of this novel. This response would become clearer in his next novel, *The Stone Country*.

Laden clouds marched in from the ocean

For La Guma the novelist, confined to his home, the weather was a potential weapon – also drawn from Steinbeck's armoury – in the struggle against apartheid. One could use it against the 'regime's tourist propaganda that it [South Africa] is a country with perfect weather', but it also had 'symbolic potential'. This is an interpretation compatible with aspects of Cassuto's argument that *The Grapes of Wrath* 'represents an indictment of the American myth of the garden'.¹⁰⁰ Here too La Guma has used *The Grapes of Wrath*, a novel that begins with the unfulfilled hint of rain where it is needed most and ends with a deluge in the land of plenty. For this aspect, La Guma drew on the last three chapters of *The Grapes of Wrath* for his refutation of South Africa's climate as a commodity that could attract tourists, and as a signifier that all was well.¹⁰¹

In Chapter 29 Steinbeck develops, repeats and reinforces the greyness of the day. He refers to 'grey clouds', 'grey crags', 'rain that was grey to see through', 'lakes, broad and grey', 'little grey tents', 'faces... grey with terror', 'water... reflecting the grey sky'.¹⁰² In *And a Threefold Cord*, La Guma uses grey and black as adjectives more than any other colour. He punctuates this repetition, which contributes to the novel's oppressive and heavy mood, with references to brown and to Charlie's 'yellow Corporation slicker'.¹⁰³ La Guma also refers to the 'lone carnation on the dump' which echoes 'the spot of red', a 'scraggy geranium gone wild', which Ruthie and Winfield fight over as the Joads search for shelter after Rose of Sharon's still-birth.¹⁰⁴ It is also possible that La Guma drew the military images first found in Chapter 1 of *And a Threefold Cord* from Chapter 29 of *The*

Grapes of Wrath, though these would probably also have echoed his own experiences of combined police and military action during the State of Emergency. 'Over the high coast mountains and over the valleys the grey clouds marched in from the ocean', wrote Steinbeck at the beginning of Chapter 29, while in Chapter 1 of *And a Threefold Cord* La Guma refers to 'laden clouds [that] marched in from the ocean', and then develops the idea of a military attack through words and phrases such as 'commanded', 'ramparts', 'held them at bay', 'grey-uniformed fog', 'assault', 'retreat'.

This image-cluster incorporates the idea of a pregnancy that starts out as a 'promise' but soon becomes a 'threat', a transition implicit in the shift from water as source of life to water as destroyer.¹⁰⁵ Through Blanche's work as midwife amongst the poorest communities in Cape Town, La Guma was well aware of the threat to life associated with pregnancy and delivery in informal settlements. This provides the background for the themes of revenge and renewal associated with Michael Adonis and Grace Lorenzo in *A Walk in the Night*, and death and renewal for Ronny and Caroline in *And a Threefold Cord*. However, these texts explore the political implication of this theme in different ways. Having expressed the political implications through a 'scene of representation' in *A Walk in the Night*, La Guma did not develop Steinbeck's warning that 'in the eyes of the hungry there is a growing wrath. In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy with the vintage'.¹⁰⁶ Banned, detained and placed under house arrest for his participation in the liberation movement, there was little point for La Guma in warning his oppressors of what had already happened.¹⁰⁷

In Steinbeck's novel, political warnings occur most often in its intercalary chapters such as Chapter 15 and 28. These chapters do more than carry a political message that might interfere with the representations of the social reality and the political consciousness of Steinbeck's characters, or possibly intrude into the story of the Joad family.¹⁰⁸ They also have an 'anthropological' quality, for they describe one group to another group for whom it is an object of enquiry and study.¹⁰⁹ An examination of *And a Threefold Cord's* 28 chapters suggests that La Guma drew on

and modified this narrative and discursive strategy. Like *The Grapes of Wrath*, and unlike *A Walk in the Night*, which begins at the beginning, or the biography of his father and *The Stone Country*, which begin *in medias res*, *And a Threefold Cord* opens with a chapter that is devoid of references to specific characters but sets the scene in social and symbolic literary terms. These terms include the references to the winter weather assaulting the houses, the basic palette of colours La Guma would use in the novel, the organic images of pregnancy and rain as renewal or threat, the response of the people described in general and the central idea of 'permanent reconstruction':

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 mountains. When the bursts of rain came, knocking on the roofs, working-men carried home loads of pilfered corrugated 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.¹¹⁰

In *The Grapes of Wrath* Chapter 23 describes migrant culture through 'the storyteller', getting drunk, music, dancing and sex.¹¹¹ Chapter 23 follows the Joad family's arrival and integration into the Weedpatch camp with its collective government. It is no coincidence that in *And a Threefold Cord* Chapter 19, which describes the culture of the shanty-dwellers by mentioning *moppies*, songs from the Coon carnival and music provided by African customers at Aunt Mina's shebeen, follows the co-operation and racial integration that accompanied Pa's funeral.

In *The Grapes of Wrath* the intercalary chapters take the story forward. They offer generalised background and social comment on the plight of the migrants, without interrupting the story of the Joad family.¹¹² While La Guma was aware of this pattern, he did not deploy it uniformly. Chapters 1 and 2 of *And a Threefold*

Cord replicate the opening of *The Grapes of Wrath*, but nothing resembles an intercalary chapter until Chapter 7 on 'drunk 'Ria', and after that there is nothing until Chapter 15 on Roman. By virtue of their specificity, these chapters are more like journalistic vignettes than the social-symbolic descriptions found in Steinbeck. By contrast, Chapter 17 of *And a Threefold Cord* deals with water as a symbol and commodity and has sufficient generality to qualify as an intercalary chapter in the Steinbeck mould. In this instance La Guma drew on images of machinery that he had used in earlier journalism and fiction to describe those with economic or political power.¹¹³ Chapter 19 describes 'a time for laughter and for merriment' after Pa's funeral but would not qualify as an intercalary chapter on the Steinbeck model.¹¹⁴ Like Chapter 25, it too refers to specific individuals who reappear in the action chapters. The last chapter opens with a partial repetition of the novel's first paragraph. This intimation of a circle suggests that La Guma approached his second novel with a stronger sense of design than his first and that he derived some aspects of this design from Steinbeck's novel.

There are at least three possible reasons why La Guma modified Steinbeck's alternation of intercalary and action chapters. First, his journalism gave him the capacity to produce vignettes that could advance and deepen the action chapters by providing social-symbolic commentary, but the specificity of journalism encouraged inclusion of more rather than less detail. Secondly, in this period La Guma worked with restricted settings such as District Six in *A Walk in the Night* or a prison in *The Stone Country* and preferred shorter time frames. Neither setting would have precluded the alternation of intercalary and action chapters, but they were less conducive to this format. Where *The Grapes of Wrath* is the story of a journey across the USA over a period of six to nine months and restricts its simultaneous chapters to Chapters 9 and 10, *And a Threefold Cord* has one major setting and its action takes place over a much shorter period. Thirdly, where the action of *The Grapes of Wrath* unfolds sequentially, the action of Chapters 20-24 in *And a Threefold Cord* occurs simultaneously. While this intensifies the novel's sense of compression it works against the inclusion of intercalary chapters.

These factors indicate that in stylistic and narratological terms La Guma drew on Steinbeck but did not depend on him. By this stage the continuities with La Guma's earlier fiction and journalism had laid the basis for a discernible La Guma style. This does not mean that La Guma was impervious to the political dimensions of Steinbeck's novel. We have already seen that a substantial body of La Guma scholarship subscribes to the view that his novels represent a sequence of graded stages on the road to revolutionary political consciousness and collective political organisation, that Mkhize found the influence of Gorky in *And a Threefold Cord*, and that this is part of a project to define the moment at which La Guma's fiction became social realist in nature.¹¹⁵ To a greater or lesser degree these critics also assume some form of correlation between La Guma's literary influences and the political programme or degree of political consciousness displayed in a particular text. Coetzee and Mkhize argue that the relationship was causal – that his own politics and what he read caused La Guma to write in a particular way, and that this in turn made him more predisposed to certain subject matter. My view supports the form of their argument but substitutes different political and psychological factors, and other novels and novelists. Following the logic of this interpretive pattern, I will now examine the relationship between the political ideals expressed in *The Grapes of Wrath* and *And a Threefold Cord*. As we saw earlier, La Guma acknowledged Steinbeck's influence but distanced himself from the American writer by bracketing him with Tolstoy.

The sound of an impossible sadness

There has been considerable debate about the political opinions and allegiances expressed in Steinbeck's novel. For some, *The Grapes of Wrath* is about the need for community and sharing, while others see it as a celebration of individualism.¹¹⁶ La Guma's novel also expresses a mixed message, but not necessarily for the same reasons. Both novelists criticise social and economic inequalities and both propose that the oppressed should establish some form of union. Towards the end of his novel Steinbeck refers explicitly and positively to trade-union activities, but through

Tom Joad ends up saying that the migrants should “[a]ll work together for our own thing—all farm our own lan”. This undermines and negates the novel’s strong sense of community and collective action.¹¹⁷ By contrast, Charlie argues that “if the poor people all got together and took everything in the whole blerry world, there wouldn’t be poor no more”, and that “if all the stuff in the world was shared out among everybody, all would have enough to live nice...people got to stick together to get this stuff”.¹¹⁸ In practical terms, though, he does no more than knock down a policeman and confirm his intention to marry Freda. Despite the apparent similarity between Steinbeck and La Guma, there are several significant differences.

Firstly, their respective uses of Tom Paine, their treatments of the state and the way they close their works provide useful ways of assessing the differences between their political positions. Both evoked Tom Paine in defence of their positions but for different reasons. Steinbeck evoked Paine in order to advise the ‘Western States’ of the USA and his readers that ‘if [they] could know that Paine, Marx, Jefferson, Lenin were results, not causes, [they] might survive’. In *New Age*, La Guma quoted Paine to point out that the struggle for freedom in South Africa required more than the “summer soldier and the sunshine patriot”.¹¹⁹ By linking figures associated with communism and left wing revolution to figures associated with radical bourgeois democracy and the founding of the American state, Steinbeck warned his readers that by doing nothing for the ‘half million people moving over the country’ they were creating the conditions for a revolution which could justifiably draw on both these political traditions.¹²⁰ La Guma’s purpose was different. He sought to warn his readers that the struggle for freedom in South Africa would be long and difficult, and he tried to broaden the liberation movement’s support base as much as possible.¹²¹ The way in which Steinbeck avoids attributing to the state any blame or responsibility for the position of the migrants – whose Hoovervilles were not dissimilar to Windermere or Cooks Bush – suggests his hope that the state could or should resolve the antagonism between agricultural capital and the landless migrants.¹²² We can be reasonably certain that La Guma would not have agreed with Steinbeck here.

By contrast, there is less difference between the endings of the two novels. Though La Guma drew heavily on the last three chapters of *The Grapes of Wrath*, he took his ending from a much earlier part of that novel. In Chapter 4 of *The Grapes of Wrath*, after Casy has explained to Tom Joad why he discarded charismatic Christianity and was no longer a preacher, and Tom has told him about prison life and how one comes to depend on its routine, Steinbeck describes how the 'yellowing, dusty, afternoon light put a golden colour on the land. A flight of swallows swooped overhead toward some waterhole.'¹²³ While the clearest reference to this passage in La Guma's work appears in the last paragraph of *Time of the Butcherbird*, where he wrote that '[t]he yellowing afternoon light puts a golden colour on the land. A flight of birds swoop overhead towards a waterhole', there are indications that in *And a Threefold Cord* La Guma saw in this vignette a device with two related purposes.¹²⁴ Firstly, it could bring to a conclusion issues with which the novel was concerned, such as the need for unity and co-operation, and the political and economic principles based on these needs. Secondly, it could close the novel on a note that was descriptive, optimistic and symbolic of the need for downward identification and upward adaptation. In the case of the former, during Pa's funeral – an instance of co-operation among shanty dwellers – La Guma describes a finch that 'descended...from the sky...and then suddenly fluttered and started away, flying like an arrow between the trees'. In the case of the latter – after he has told Freda that "people was just *made* to be together" – Charlie 'looked out at the rain, [and] he saw, to his surprise, a bird dart suddenly from among the patchwork roofs of the shanties and head straight, straight into the sky'.¹²⁵

In *A Walk in the Night*, La Guma had already used images derived from the natural world such as pregnancy, the crashing surf and 'the mysterious life of the sea things'.¹²⁶ He uses these to close the novel and to suggest the possibility of further political developments. In his second novel, by drawing on this evocative passage from Steinbeck and transforming its symbolism to accommodate the fear of regression, and downward adaptation, and the necessity for upward identification through collective action, he was able to convey the idea that reconstruction of the

home, family and community were both necessary and desirable. Where *The Grapes of Wrath* gestures towards a world with reconfigured family relationships and freedom from oppression, but closes with ameliorative examples of personal generosity and altruism, *And a Threefold Cord* proposes collective political action and economic redistribution but ends with the valorisation of personal and family relationships. In this respect, Steinbeck provides La Guma with an open-ended closure, but only by providing a literary solution to a political problem.¹²⁷ It is likely that it would have been difficult to consider and implement other sorts of endings. He wrote within a literary tradition of novels that dealt with social problems which required resolutions, and the political context of this novel – glimmerings of a socialist consciousness pitted against the might of the apartheid state – meant that indications of future collective resistance would have to find expression in symbolic and non-political forms.

Having focused on the problems which accompanied his debt to Steinbeck, we can now examine in detail turn to some of the reasons why La Guma was influenced by Steinbeck, and why he was unwilling to admit this influence.

An acknowledged debt to Steinbeck would have made his own work appear less original, less reliant on journalistic observation and less South African. It might also have invited political criticisms from those who saw in *The Grapes of Wrath's* ending a less than radical social programme.¹²⁸ That La Guma was so affected by Steinbeck and *The Grapes of Wrath* in particular is understandable. We have already seen that in La Guma's youth, Steinbeck was a fashionable novelist. In addition, Steinbeck wrote simply and exposed injustice, his works were sympathetic to the poor, the film adaptation had been well received, and it would not have been difficult to draw parallels between the conditions in Windermere and Cook's Bush and the Hooverilles of *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath*.¹²⁹ There were other, less obvious but equally important factors. Among these we can include La Guma's emotional and psychological state when he wrote this work. La Guma was beginning a period of prolonged isolation from society. He did not stop his political work completely, but he had received a five-year banning order which restricted him to a

small area and which isolated him socially and politically. As we have already seen in the case of his father, who, after his first expulsion from the CPSA, participated in a variety of organisations in order to fulfil the needs which political activism and party membership had met, La Guma used writing for this purpose. From this perspective, the novel is the expression of a need for more contact with others and for a concomitant sense of community. “‘Is not natural for people to be alone’”, Charlie tells Freda in the last chapter of the novel.¹³⁰ This also suggests why La Guma later denied the extent of Steinbeck’s influence, for he would have associated Steinbeck and *The Grapes of Wrath* with a period of personal need and vulnerability.

We also need to consider the significance of death in La Guma’s longer prose, particularly since we can associate the deaths in *And a Threefold Cord* with events in his family. We can attribute all of the deaths in La Guma’s other longer prose works to political and economic factors that have apartheid injustices and inequalities at their root. The deaths in *A Walk in the Night* are a consequence of internecine tensions, racism and coincidence, in *The Stone Country* of power struggles that aid the jailers or gesture towards a more humane society, while in *In the Fog of the Seasons’ End* death occurs at the hands of the police through interrogation or massacre, and in *Time of the Butcherbird* the death of a brother precipitates revenge killings that lead to a growth in political consciousness.¹³¹ The case of *And a Threefold Cord* is slightly different, for while we can attribute the deaths of Pa, Ronald, Klonky and Grace to factors found in his other novels, they are also family deaths. They are accepted and experienced as losses for which there is no recompense, and while Charlie connects these deaths to his assertions about the need for community, they do not precipitate a desire for revenge. During the period in which he worked on *And a Threefold Cord* La Guma had personal experience of deaths in his family. His father died in July 1961 and his mother in April 1962. He started *Jimmy* with a public request for information about his father Jimmy – an act that reminded him of his loss.

The death of Pa Pauls is inevitable; nevertheless it evokes powerful expressions of grief from Ronald, Caroline, Jorny and Ma, whose regressive response La Guma

describes as 'a strange, harsh chant...and her body rocked gently back and forth as she half-sang and half-spoke'. At this point she is still in charge for she retains the family 'reins of government' until after Pa's funeral.¹³² Freda's emotions as she watches her children burn to death might also be an example of regression, but one compounded by her lack of preparedness, her helplessness and her guilt:

At first it was a wail, and then it became a sort of shrill, horrid gobbling, an awful sound-picture which might conjure up the abominable death-rites of some primitive tribe. It rose to a high, nerve-plucking ululation which was something more than a scream or a shriek, the sound of an impossible sadness, a sound beyond agony, an outcry of unendurable woe, forlorn beyond comprehension, a sort of grief beyond grief.¹³³

Such descriptions of emotion have been the subject of literary and political critique. Carpenter stresses the politically problematic aspects of La Guma's descriptions of extreme emotions. He could just as easily have used this passage to support his view that in moments of 'horror' La Guma 'reaches for a nineteenth-century anthropology in which biological and cultural evolution are indistinguishable'.¹³⁴ Politically and anthropologically, La Guma's descriptions of emotion can be seen as exposing his fear of downward adaptation. There is no denying the problematic aspects of La Guma's descriptive choices. They point to a fear of or distaste for extreme emotion that equates civilisation with emotional self-control. Having acknowledged this, we need to consider La Guma's agenda. He was trying to express the experience of emotions. Given the centrality of the family in this text, Freda's responses to the manner in which she loses her family suggest what Winnicott terms a 'primitive agony'. This agony leads to a breakdown that is really a way of organising one's emotional defences.¹³⁵ In Freda's case, witnessing the death of her children and the destruction of her home would precipitate the experience of a 'primitive agony' and a breakdown. *And a Threefold Cord* gives voice to grief and mourning through defensive and controlling strategies. By naming

and describing every object or emotion *and* by a desire to let emotions overflow, La Guma indicates that Freda is trying to express the inexpressible. In effect, the 'one-sidedness' of Carpenter's interpretation prevents him from grasping the ambivalence and complexity of the novel's emotional dimensions.

Between the death of Pa and the death of her children, Freda and Charlie re-establish their relationship. The process of re-establishing the relationship has its own intimations of death. After the family supper in which Charlie talks about the 'slim burg', he goes to Freda's shack. Before they make love he jokes that "shell-shock in the war" may have prevented him from marrying her.¹³⁶ Then follows 'a roaring in his ears' – as if he was under attack – and his own lapse into an instinctual state as 'he slid into the pleasure without thought, like a stone into a pool'.¹³⁷ All this occurs on the same night that his father dies. Later, during the night after Pa's funeral, again in Freda's shack, he dreams that they are both sheltering under the truck he drove during the Second World War. They are sheltering from bombardment by Italian mortars. Just as he had done in *A Walk in the Night* and in his later short stories, La Guma attributes the cause of Charlie's dream to outside forces that inflict pain. In this case it is the 'sound of fists beating against the door' during the police raid.¹³⁸ Again Charlie associates the memory of war with the experience of sex, but this time he is not 'without thought' in the feminised landscape of a dream whose sound effects merge with the sound effects of a police raid.¹³⁹ In its turn the raid – which acts as a backdrop to the processes of copulation, death and birth – leads him to express his emotional commitment to Freda and to make a small gesture of political defiance by knocking down a policeman.¹⁴⁰ Before the death of his father, Charlie recalls his experiences with the "French goose in Alexandria". After Pa's death his object of desire changes, but with Freda he relives experiences of being close to death and only expresses his love for her after the insulting invasion of their privacy during the police raid. While we cannot say that the death of his father alone is sufficient to persuade Charlie to make a lifelong commitment to Freda, it is associated with a release from the past. In this case it enables two forms of 'the shadow of the object' to fade.¹⁴¹ Firstly, there is

the object of previous desire in Alexandria, for to let go of her and to embrace Freda is to acknowledge that he is in South Africa, and that he faces a different conflict. Secondly there is the father object that, like the ghosts of *A Walk in the Night* and *Time of the Butcherbird*, has been neither dead nor alive for an undisclosed period. His death facilitates the reconfiguration of the Pauls family, its return to patriarchal governance and Charlie's upward identification. If we take up this strand from *A Walk in the Night*, we can see that Coetzee's interpretation that Joe 'drifts towards death' is too literal. Carpenter's observation that 'the awakening of political identity... can also awaken an oceanic nostalgia, a dedication to self-sacrifice... and a love for one's vulnerable fellow sufferers' grasps the psychological and political implications more clearly.¹⁴²

Carpenter probably has in mind Freud's "'oceanic" feeling' – 'a feeling of an indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole'.¹⁴³ This is not dissimilar to Steinbeck's belief in an undifferentiated state of being which informs his notion of community and family, and which underlies La Guma's treatment of the Pauls family and its capacity to survive and grow. In 1957 La Guma had already touched on this in his first published art review. For him the birth of creativity, altruism, collective identity and political consciousness required the death of the ego. Despite his own earlier analyses of the limitations of political consciousness and SACPO's search for a strategy with which it could mobilise coloured support for the Congress Alliance, knowledge of the process by which people's political attitudes and commitments could be changed remained elusive.¹⁴⁴

Mourning plays an important part in *And a Threefold Cord*. At its most general, Freud saw mourning as 'the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on'.¹⁴⁵ If we apply this to *And a Threefold Cord*, then the text becomes one of the ways in which La Guma sought to acknowledge and adapt to the several forms of loss he experienced at that time. One of the few means of expression available to him at that time was writing, and he was able to sublimate mourning for the loss of family members and to express his admiration and love for

Blanche through this novel. He initially thought it would be a love-story and dedicated it to her 'with love'.¹⁴⁶

The importance of mourning and loss also helps to explain why La Guma did not include 'On a Wedding Day' in *And a Threefold Cord*.¹⁴⁷ The former recounts the preparations for the wedding of Jessie, the equivalent of Caroline in the novel, and contains several of the novel's characters and objects. These include Ma Pauls, Charlie, a healthy Dad Pauls, Ronny, Uncle Ben, the creaking pondokkie and the old bedstead. According to Abrahams, La Guma first viewed it as a short story that he reworked into the novel. To claim, as Abrahams does, that La Guma 'transformed' it is something of an understatement, because he incorporated characters but none of the action, and therefore the two texts have very different emphases.¹⁴⁸ If La Guma felt that the wedding in 'On a Wedding Day' had no place in what became *And a Threefold Cord*, this was not necessarily because he was reserving material for a subsequent work, for I shall demonstrate in the next chapter that there are several instances where he used similar descriptions or characters in a succession of works in different genres. Nor was it because *The Grapes of Wrath* contains no wedding. *And a Threefold Cord* contains several events that have no parallel in Steinbeck's novel. It is more likely that the subject matter – the wedding and the story's focus on a happy event – was not a suitable vehicle for the convergence of personal emotions and political principles that he needed to express at that time. In the form in which it was published, *And a Threefold Cord* functioned more effectively as an expression of his love for Blanche, his need to mourn the various forms of loss and death that he had experienced, and his desire to express a need for community. Clearly house-arrest and detention without trial placed him under great strain, and I shall argue later that La Guma's painting during this period offered him another means to express the experiences of being trapped and persecuted, and articulated his fear of breaking down which Freda's primitive agony had already represented.

I am thy father's ghost

The first long text that La Guma began after *A Walk in the Night* was *Jimmy La Guma: A biography*. Increasingly illegible copies of the manuscript have circulated since the mid-1960s, but in 1997 it was published in book form. Adhikari, the editor of the 1997 edition, has provided a more detailed biography of Jimmy la Guma, but it makes little sense to compare the two, for the aim here is to assess *Jimmy* in relation to Alex la Guma, his texts and ideas.¹⁴⁹ The most important of these texts are his autobiographical pieces. That La Guma did not complete *Jimmy* until 1964 – by which time *And a Threefold Cord* had appeared, he had shelved plans to write an extensive history of coloured politics, and his mother had died – has implications for its assessment.¹⁵⁰

In March 1962, *New Age* reported that 'a number of personalities well-known in South African politics' had sponsored the formation of the Jimmy la Guma Memorial Fund, which had commissioned La Guma to write a biography of his father.¹⁵¹ The original suggestion for the biography came from Ray Alexander. Initially the Fund had no money, but it received funding from the Bill Andrews Memorial Fund which Alexander and Jack Cope had set up in the early 1950s 'to encourage the writing of working class history'. According to Alexander, La Guma received R300 from that fund.¹⁵² This was a considerable sum at that time.

The biography covers his father's life in five chapters: early years; the 1920s; the 1930s; the 1940s; his final 11 years. Its status as the first account of Jimmy la Guma's life is enough to make it an important document, but viewed as a text by Alex la Guma it has additional significance. A conventional biography is an appropriate genre through which to assess the narrative techniques and content choices that La Guma made at this time. The formal and informal contracts between writer, publisher and reader acknowledge that the biographer needs to select, organise and integrate the available material into a coherent narrative. They also oblige the biographer to tell the truth about his or her subject or to develop interpretations and narratives adequately grounded in the documented aspects of the subject's life. In effect, biographer and reader accept that biography combines

narratives of the historical real – what actually happened – and realistic narratives – stories that are plausible.¹⁵³ As a journalist and political activist, La Guma distinguished the real from the realistic, but as a novelist he worked with a less rigid distinction between them. We have seen that in his second novel ‘it was a matter of recording history or recording [a] situation’ because ‘the picture of suburban slums did not appear anywhere in South African writing’.¹⁵⁴ This implies that La Guma set out to capture in words an observable reality. We have also seen that he drew on *The Grapes of Wrath* for its narrative techniques, stylistic devices and content. He used these aspects of Steinbeck’s novel to synthesise his wife’s experiences with his own journalism and political and emotional concerns. By drawing on yet occluding Steinbeck’s influence, La Guma acknowledged, but did not admit, that aspects of a fictional text could represent reality as well as, if not better than, the process of documenting events and processes. He did not collapse the distinction between them so much as move between them by combining the material referred to above. This integration of various facts, fictions and devices into an imaginative whole – as in all fiction – together with the knowledge that he had considered writing a history of coloured politics after he finished *Jimmy*, suggests that during the period 1962-1964 La Guma became increasingly conscious of the way in which he wrote.¹⁵⁵ The sections on his later short stories and *The Stone Country* will develop this point.

One indication of this awareness lies in the way his beginnings change. Unlike *Little Libby* and *A Walk in the Night*, *Jimmy* does not start at the beginning of his life. Where the first two begin with specific characters who remain more or less at the centre of the story, the second novel and *Jimmy* begin with more general, contextual scenes. Only later does one encounter the chief protagonists. Through this experiment with other beginnings, La Guma implied that there were alternatives to a linear chronology, and that narrative strategies derived from fiction could provide biography with adequate models.¹⁵⁶ *Jimmy*’s point of departure is the brutal German colonisation of former South West Africa (SWA) during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This provides the context for Jimmy’s arrival there at about the age of 16, and enables La Guma to begin the biography with political

action within a politically reactionary environment against which his father rebelled, and with a set of personal qualities to which earlier events could contribute. It also provided a model for his own autobiographical pieces.

According to La Guma, his father's 'association with the working-class movement started during his boyhood' through books such as Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*.¹⁵⁷ Tressell's work first appeared in April 1914, so Jimmy could not have read it during his childhood, but he might have read it while in SWA or later in Cape Town.¹⁵⁸ The passage on Tressell also contains phrases similar to those La Guma would later use to describe how literature contributed to his own political awareness and development. La Guma contrasted his father's bookish habits as a boy with those of his less serious friends, and nine years later, in one of his autobiographical articles on why he too became a communist, La Guma drew a similar contrast between himself as a child and his contemporaries.¹⁵⁹ Secondly, in *Jimmy* La Guma wrote that Tressell's 'account of the life and struggles of the British workers fascinated him, and Tressell's [*sic*] tuberculosis-stricken hero was also Jimmy's. He saw in that book the struggles of all working people'.¹⁶⁰ In the autobiographical piece already referred to, La Guma wrote how he saw in Jack London's *People of the Abyss* his 'own community ground down under the weight of poverty, oppression and ignorance'. La Guma also wondered if 'oppressed people all over were the same', and whether *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* contained 'our own working men'.¹⁶¹ Also, in *Jimmy* he described how his father's 'urge to seek new horizons' led him to SWA, while in an autobiographical article that appeared 18 years after *Jimmy* he wrote of his own 'search for something else' and of his desire 'to belong'.¹⁶²

There are several possible reasons for this similarity between *Jimmy* and his own autobiographical pieces. Before his death Jimmy had started work on his autobiography which he proposed to call 'The Proud Proletarian'. If he had already mapped out the order of events by decades, it is possible that La Guma took over this framework but adapted it by changing the beginning of the work.¹⁶³ Having established a narrative formula for the origins of working-class consciousness, he

applied it to his own later autobiographical articles. These pieces appeared in *The African Communist* as exempla. Thus the formula had a political purpose – to encourage others to become members of the Party during its legal period – and Jimmy's autobiographical notes, his son's biography and autobiographical pieces became a means of avoiding personal disclosures by fixing the political identities of father and son. They also contributed to La Guma's view of himself as the 'autobiographical subject' which the preceding analysis of *And a Threefold Cord* has shown was already developing.

La Guma indicates that his father's real political education began in SWA when he helped to form a trade union among striking diamond mine workers, and later founded a branch of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU).¹⁶⁴ This lends support to the view that La Guma's novels deal with the growth of a political consciousness that reaches maturity with communism. In the biography, Jimmy moves from his own naïve efforts based on theory rather than practice, though he does not say what or whose theories influenced him, to the ICU, and then to Cape Town where he becomes editor of the *Worker's Herald*. This is followed by a brief period as a union organiser in Port Elizabeth and finally to the Communist Party of South Africa which he joins in year of his son's birth. The Party would remain his preferred political home for the rest of his life.¹⁶⁵

La Guma records that his father viewed the German artisans of SWA sympathetically because they displayed proletarian class-consciousness. As the defeated strikers – one of whom held up a stick with a faded red scarf 'decorated with polka dots' – left for Luderitz, 'German artisans working in the machine-shops looked up and saw the red neckerchief passing. They lowered their tools and raised their clenched fists in salute.'¹⁶⁶ On the other hand, he had little patience for their white South African counterparts. Despite their contrasting views on issues such as the ICU, the impact of Garveyism, the Harlem Renaissance and the role of the CPSA, it seems he would have agreed with Ruth Grainger in *Wild Deer*. South Africa, Grainger said,

‘...is the only Paradise on earth for...[w]hite labourers and their tired wives.... Nothing makes them forget their socialist principles so soon as having a native servant at ten shillings a month to do the rough work. Even the communists can make no headway against the prevailing lotus-eating socialists. No bloated mine magnate or idle farmer is more profoundly in favour of the colour-bar than the white “labour” man whose wife no longer scrubs the floor.’¹⁶⁷

After the 1922 strike with its ‘notorious slogan of “Workers of the world unite for a white South Africa”’, Jimmy was even more convinced that the future of the struggle against ‘racial discrimination and for national liberation’ depended upon black South African leadership.¹⁶⁸ It was in the wake of this strike, at a time when white support for the Party was declining and those who shared his views had greater influence, that Jimmy, whose Cape Town base had a more stable and urbanised proletariat than the migrant workers of the Transvaal, joined the CPSA.¹⁶⁹

We do not know what sort of response La Guma’s request for information on his father elicited. We do know that he had *Time Longer Than Rope* by Roux, his father’s personal papers, Jimmy’s ‘sketchy notes’ for an autobiography, and various documents from the 1920s onwards. There were also the numerous stories that Jimmy enjoyed telling about himself.¹⁷⁰ Jimmy’s life generated plenty of these, and the fact that La Guma included several – and from almost every phase of his father’s life – suggests there were many from which he could choose. They contribute a picaresque dimension – a quality it shares with the comic strip – to an otherwise serious life story. Jimmy la Guma and Roux had been involved in many of the Party’s most important debates, campaigns and problems from the 1920s to the 1930s. These included the debates around the 1922 miners’ strike, the independent native republic thesis, the two-stage thesis, and the ‘left’ period of the Party under Bach and Wolton. Like Jimmy, Roux had allowed his Party membership to lapse but never rejoined. In 1957 Roux became a member of the Liberal Party. Roux’s book contains the invaluable testimony of an active participant. Even if it makes a

distinction between Marxism as 'empirical study' and as a 'dogmatic creed' – which father and son would have rejected out of hand – it reported favourably on the contributions of the ANC, CPSA and their predecessors to national liberation.¹⁷¹

Despite these differences, Roux's work determined part of *Jimmy's* content and its historiography, and was part of a larger circulation of texts and ideas. It provided La Guma with material for events such as his father's handling of black responses to the 1922 white miners' strike and Tielman Roos' proposed Sedition Bill, the ICU's support for Hertzog before the Pact electoral victory in 1924, and the right-wing shift of the ICU after Party members were expelled.¹⁷² Roux based much of these parts of *Time Longer than Rope* on the interpretations of events that had occurred while he was still a Party member.¹⁷³ However the La Gumas did not share Roux's interpretation of the Comintern's influence. Both supported and encouraged the Party's efforts to increase the number of African members, but differed on the independent native republic slogan. Roux saw the latter as an obstacle to Party growth and development. La Guma and his father felt that the Party underwent a renaissance after it accepted the slogan.¹⁷⁴ La Guma applied Jimmy's interpretation of the Party's history - emergence, rise and decline - to the two other political movements in which his father was involved. This too may have come from *Time Longer than Rope* which in turn had drawn on Toynbee's three-phase cyclical view of history.¹⁷⁵

Limited resources were not La Guma's only problem. The state used the Suppression of Communism Act against him. We have already seen that in October 1963 the security police raided the La Gumas, and that on that occasion they also removed large quantities of books and press clippings. These included material from *Fighting Talk* that he was using to write the biography of his father. They arrested La Guma, held him in solitary confinement for 14 days, and then charged him with possession of a banned publication. In May the following year – around the time he finished *Jimmy* – he was found guilty of possessing a banned publication and sentenced to 30 days in jail.¹⁷⁶ About four months after La Guma made his appeal through *New Age* he and 101 others, including Roux, were banned under the

General Law Amendment Act. The act prohibited communication between banned people.¹⁷⁷ The act must have restricted La Guma's access to the information which others, many of them also banned, had on his father, and this partly accounts for the uneven quality of the information and the varying depth of analysis. Ray Alexander, for instance, used a third party to supply La Guma with information about the 1927 League Against Imperialism conference, which Jimmy attended shortly before his first visit to the Soviet Union, and this section of *Jimmy* contains verbatim quotations from League documents.¹⁷⁸

However, the traffic in ideas and documents on this issue was not one way. Jack Simons and Ray Alexander must have obtained a copy of *Jimmy* before they completed *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950*. They describe Jimmy as one of the few people who could combine 'a firm adherence to Marxist theory with a passionate belief in national liberation', and who could therefore 'conceive the prospect of African rule as a necessary first stage in the achievement of a classless society'.¹⁷⁹ As part of the prelude to their discussion of the independent native republic thesis they quote La Guma's comment that at the conference Jimmy 'had the opportunity to discuss questions pertaining to the national struggle in his own country with many leaders of the colonial countries'.¹⁸⁰ The result was the affirmation of an analysis by the repetition of passages drawn from texts to whose content they themselves had already contributed. This does not mean that in all cases where *Jimmy* and *Class and Colour* follow the same sequence the authors of the latter also provided La Guma with material or that he influenced them. Both deal with the League Against Imperialism, La Guma's description of his father's recollection of Bukharin, and the debate over the independent native republic thesis between the Comintern and the CPSA in the same order. This sequence fitted well with widely held views, such as the idea of a progression from a stage of progressive nationalism to a classless society which the slogan of 'A South African Native republic, as stage towards a workers' and peasants' government, with full guarantees of the rights of minorities', proposed.¹⁸¹

La Guma devotes several pages to the independent native republic debate. Since his chief aim was to demonstrate that Jimmy's views coincided with the view of the Comintern and that the Comintern's view was correct, he allocates considerable space to the debate between Jimmy and S.P. Bunting.¹⁸² When, after the Buntings had returned from Moscow, and the slogan had been accepted, La Guma wrote that 'the Party in South Africa introduced a new spirit of courage and militancy at a time when oppression was reaching new heights', he was praising his father for introducing these qualities into the Party.¹⁸³ Sympathetic histories of the Party such as *Class and Colour*, in which Simons and Alexander write that '[t]he value of the "independent native republic" slogan was that it jolted the party into awareness of its new role, and inspired in Africans a determination to reject the unquestioned assumption of perpetual white domination', treat the debate around this slogan as a sea-change, and La Guma regards this as the high point of his father's long involvement with the Communist Party.¹⁸⁴ At this very moment, as we have seen, La Guma placed himself on the political stage, also 'reaching new heights', by describing how he rode 'shoulder-high, waving the black, green and gold colours of the ANC, down Adderley Street, in Cape Town'.¹⁸⁵ This self-presentation and self-elevation had several functions. La Guma wished to praise his father and to associate himself with this important event, for we saw in Chapter Four that acceptance of the independent native republic slogan was implicit in his criticism of George Peake, and in the 'prairie fire' document used against him in the Treason Trial. Secondly, it confirms what we have already suggested in this section: that La Guma's model of masculinity developed through a 'positional' rather than a 'personal' identification with the father, and that this form of identification developed from a fantasised masculine role due to his father's long absences.¹⁸⁶ Thirdly, it is one of several instances in *Jimmy* in which he writes about himself – the earliest being his description of how his infant cries silenced his mother's voice and created further opportunities for the father on whose political shoulders he would stand. The fact that he rode on Dora Alexander's shoulders acknowledges by default the

contribution of women to his political development. In this way *Jimmy* was a means of reinstating his father and, to a much lesser extent, his mother.¹⁸⁷

Instances of commotion

That La Guma should reinstate his mother and father in different ways is borne out by other aspects of the text. His treatment of the period after Jimmy had been expelled from the Party and before formation of the National Liberation League of South Africa (NLL) suggests that politics was the most important domain in his father's and his own life, for *Jimmy* contains no information about Jimmy and the Cape Literary and Debating Society which the second chapter of this thesis covered.

Chapters 2 and 3 of *Jimmy* both progress towards a climax represented by the success of a mass-based campaign. Chapter 2 focuses on the Party and the independent native republic slogan, and ends with the joint ICU, ANC, CPSA protest against the Riotous Assemblies Act. Chapter 3 concentrates on the NLL and can be read as a critique of the Party's 'left' period in which many, including Jimmy, were expelled for alleged 'right' deviations, and as an affirmation that the broad front strategy depicted at the end of Chapter 2 was the correct approach. La Guma presents his father's moves towards formation of the NLL as a process of one step backward and two steps forwards at a time when the Party was doing the exact opposite. He writes that Jimmy 'felt himself bound by the resolution to which he had been a party at the anti-imperialist conference in Brussels, long ago in 1927', and that his previous attempts to establish a local branch of the League Against Imperialism (LAI) had failed because organisations like the ICU and ANC lacked unity, but also acknowledges that Jimmy's personal need to be politically involved was strong enough to make him create his own political home if his first choice was unavailable.¹⁸⁸

There are other insights implicit in La Guma's story of his father's political activities at this time. Firstly, one of the issues associated with the independent native republic slogan – the degree to which whites should be in a position to influence an organisation whose membership and policies were directed towards the

liberation of the majority of South Africans – became the occasion for his expulsion from the NLL. According to La Guma, Jimmy took his lead from the League Against Imperialism which suggested that “the leadership of the [National Liberation] League shall be at all times and on all governing bodies predominantly non-European”¹⁸⁹. The response of his opponents seems to have mirrored initial reactions to the independent native republic slogan – that it was ‘against the principles of socialism and [was] one of racialism’.¹⁹⁰ When he was expelled he removed NLL documents and files, and his former colleagues had to resort to court action to retrieve this material. The NLL collapsed soon after this. While La Guma stops short of attributing its disintegration solely to his father’s actions, he does point to his father’s intransigence, for Jimmy ‘refused to believe that his attitude was incorrect, and maintained that his political colleagues who opposed him did not grasp the fundamentals of the situation in South Africa’.¹⁹¹ As La Guma remarked of his father towards the end of *Jimmy*, Jimmy ‘possessed an almost inexorable pride and belief in the correctness of his ideas. This characteristic was one of the factors which undoubtedly caused the several instances of commotion in his political career.’¹⁹² Secondly, the political reason which La Guma provides for Jimmy’s decision to volunteer for the Union Defence Force showed Jimmy adopting an independent position on the left.¹⁹³ Like his stance on the independent native republic – which he shared with the subsequently discredited Woltons and Bach – initially it was a minority position to which he steadfastly adhered and which eventually became orthodoxy. La Guma implied that, like Lenin, whose picture had hung in his maternal grandmother’s home (and which he had inherited from Jimmy), his father could see into the future.

By comparison, the chapters dealing with the rest of Jimmy’s life – from the 1940s to his death in 1961 – are shorter. Chapter 4 covers his experiences during the Second World War and details his rise to a position of responsibility, though he never discarded his political principles, or his analytic and descriptive powers. Even allowing for some exaggeration on the part of Jimmy and his son, this section shows how useful it must have been for the Cape Corps to have someone who was well

known to the soldiers, literate, a skilled orator, and organisationally experienced, and who could adhere to a political line. In his capacity as censor of the company mail, Jimmy would detect and excise deviations from a prescribed position.¹⁹⁴ La Guma includes information about Jimmy's letters to 'family and friends in the political movement back home' at a time when his son was starting to spread his own political wings in the absence of his father.¹⁹⁵ Noting that Jimmy wrote about the landscape of East Africa and about the 'future struggle of the East African peoples against imperialism', La Guma stresses the descriptive and analytic qualities of his father's letters. This coincides with the period in his autobiographical articles when he describes the emergence of his own analytic powers.¹⁹⁶ Like the relationship between Pa and Charlie in *And a Threefold Cord*, in the absence of his father La Guma could become like his father.

Following demobilisation in 1947, Jimmy rejoined the Party and participated in efforts to revive the African People's Organisation.¹⁹⁷ The attempt failed but the motivation – that there was a 'vacuum' on the 'Coloured wing' – confirmed that Jimmy still accepted the existence of specific political interests associated with an ethnic identity. It also implied that organisation and mobilisation along racial lines was an unavoidable feature of the region's political landscape, and that if the 'collaborationist' Coloured People's National Union and the 'non-collaborationist' groups associated with the Non-European Unity Movement could exist then there was room for a third coloured political movement aligned to the ANC and the CPSA. Given that La Guma wrote *Jimmy* after he had given up the idea of writing a separate history of coloured politics, we can interpret this part of Chapter 4 as an oblique and truncated history of coloured politics after the Second World War, because he links attempts at reviving the APO to participation in local and national electoral processes. La Guma writes about his father's unsuccessful contest in the Cape Town municipal elections against a candidate with a long history of support for the United Party, and then turns to the question of whether progressive whites should provide a parliamentary voice for disenfranchised Africans.¹⁹⁸ Not surprisingly, given the position which SACPO eventually adopted on participation

under the Separate Representation of Voters Act, La Guma supports the work done by Sam Kahn, Brian Bunting, Ray Alexander and Fred Carneson against 'the extreme Left and nationalistic elements in the movement and the ANC'.¹⁹⁹

Despite the fact that some ten years separated their departures from the public arena, the final chapter is an obituary of the Party and of Jimmy. Here La Guma combined assessment and post-mortem of the CPSA – he praised its 'great achievements and many struggles' but attributed its demise to the 'errors of legalism' – a standard criticism at the time – with a brief narrative and evaluation of his father's last years.²⁰⁰ Drawn back into politics by the arrest of the younger generation of activists such as his son, Jimmy could not adapt to the new style and pace of political work. Once more his personal inflexibility created problems between himself and his colleagues. Thus the inflexibility of the Party parallels his father's inability to adapt to new conditions of struggle. Detention without trial in 1960 followed, and this affected his health. Jimmy died of a heart attack in Groote Schuur hospital during July the following year. To the 'singing of 'Nkosi Sikelele iAfrika', 'The Red Flag' and the *Internationale*, he was lowered into his grave' and 'buried with the honour due to a staunch Socialist and fighter on behalf of the working class and the oppressed of South Africa'.²⁰¹

How can it be a real face? It just *looks* like a face.

Parallel to *And a Threefold Cord* and the biography, La Guma had also been writing short stories. The final section of this chapter examines the twelve short stories that he wrote in South Africa after *A Walk in the Night*. After contextualising the *Quartet* stories, which belong to an earlier period, this section analyses these twelve short pieces and argues that towards the end of his life in South Africa his stories show the influence of Hemingway's modernism.

Ulli Beier was clearly impressed with La Guma's short stories, for he wanted to publish an anthology of them. 'When you have about 12 more together', he wrote, 'please send me the lot, and again give Peter Clarke a copy so that we can print them with about six illustrations and a cover of his.' Beier also told him that his

short story 'At the Portagee's' would appear in the eleventh issue of *Black Orpheus*.²⁰² Mphahlele also praised La Guma's short stories. However, by the time La Guma had sufficient short stories, Mbari's preferences had shifted towards West African material.²⁰³ This may explain why some were unpublished until the Heinemann edition of *A Walk in the Night*.

Quartet, an anthology with four contributions each from Richard Rive, James Matthews, La Guma and Alf Wannenburg appeared in 1963. According to Wannenburg, the anthology arose from a series of literary evenings at the home of Jan Hoogendyk where they met occasionally 'over a gallon of Lieberstein'.²⁰⁴ Like La Guma, Hoogendyk had been one of the Treason Trialists. Wannenburg and Hoogendyk were good friends, as were Rive and Wannenburg. The three of them brought in Matthews and La Guma, but due to his banning and house arrest, he attended relatively few of these meetings. According to Wannenburg, La Guma was not drawn to their 'literary' qualities: 'he was little disposed to literary discourse, preferring to play his guitar and set up shot glasses and tumblers for his proletarian friends, whereas Richard [Rive] was, as he often joked, "grossly over educated", and enjoyed nothing more than talking about books and writing'.²⁰⁵ La Guma's four contributions – 'Out of Darkness', 'Slipper Satin', 'A Glass of Wine' and 'Nocturne' (an abbreviated version of 'Etude') – had all appeared during 1957 and 1960 in *New Age*, *Africa South*, and *Black Orpheus*. The fact that all of this contributions had already appeared may have been a minor blessing for La Guma because, according to Wannenburg, La Guma was 'not the sort of chap who discussed his writing; he worked away at it'.²⁰⁶

With the anthology complete, they decided to ask Alan Paton to write the foreword. By then Rive was about to leave on his Farfield Foundation trip, and he and Wannenburg travelled to Durban to see Paton. After that the manuscript was sent to several publishers. Initially Heinemann turned down the manuscript, though they later published it in their African Writers Series. However Crown publishers in the USA accepted it. The contributors were pleased, and surprised, at how quickly the anthology was accepted for it gave each of them an international profile and

readership they had not anticipated. Each author received in the region of \$250 for his contribution. In La Guma's case the money was welcome since banning and house arrest effectively prevented him from earning a living, but it also meant that the publication was banned in South Africa.²⁰⁷

From a biographical perspective it would be useful to know the order in which La Guma wrote these twelve stories. During 1963 and 1964 'At the Portagee's', 'Tattoo Marks and Nails' and 'Blankets' appeared in *Black Orpheus*. 'Coffee for the Road' was first published in 1964 in an anthology of African writing co-edited by Mphahlele. 'The Gladiators', 'The Lemon Orchard' and 'A Matter of Taste' did not appear until the 1967 Heinemann edition of *A Walk in the Night*. Since these details only provide dates after which they could not have been written, we can only speculate about the exact order of their appearance. 'At the Portagee's' and 'Blankets' share features with *A Walk in the Night*, and 'Out of Darkness' and 'Tattoo Marks and Nails' are closely linked to *The Stone Country*. However, while 'At the Portagee's' and 'Blankets' first appeared after the novella and with a one-year gap between them, seven years separate 'Out of Darkness' from 'Tattoo Marks and Nails'.²⁰⁸ Clearly neither shared subject matter nor common narrative strategy is much help in determining when La Guma wrote these stories.

One approach to this problem would be to link some stories to the longer texts with which they have most in common and to group the remainder into convenient categories, but this might imply that his longer works were more important than his shorter ones and could entrench the tendency to overlook everything except his longer prose fiction. Alternatively, one could arrange all the short stories that he wrote between 1957 and 1967 thematically, but this approach would also be unsatisfactory because one would lose a sense of the links between his longer and shorter prose. In view of these limitations, my approach will be partly chronological, partly thematic and partly based on an assessment of La Guma's narrative styles.

The setting of 'At the Portagee's' is probably the same café on the edge of District Six in which Michael Adonis and Willieboy meet and outside which the latter dies. It contains the same seating arrangements, smells, strips of flypaper,

jukebox, Portuguese owner and derelict characters.²⁰⁹ Its plot – two young men chatting up two young women against the background of the café as the Portuguese owner ejects a poor but dignified man who does not have enough money for a meal – has the same narrative technique that La Guma used in ‘A Christmas Story’. This technique relies on the narrative persona of a coloured working-class man with an ironic sense of humour. Telling his story in an idiom that evokes Kaaps, this narrative persona is sometimes a victim of his own irony and sometimes able to use it to demonstrate the limitations of other characters. This applies to ‘A Glass of Wine’, ‘A Matter of Taste’ and ‘The Gladiators’. With its references to eyes like cockroaches, fantasies about the American dream and jokes about poor people eating in expensive restaurants, ‘A Matter of Taste’ shares features with *A Walk in the Night* and ‘At the Portagee’s’.²¹⁰ A humorous morality tale about colour consciousness and racism, ‘The Gladiators’ is told by one of the seconds to the coloured boxer Kenny. Kenny was ‘[n]ot exactly like teak, because he’s lighter, just miss being white which was what make him so full of crap. He was sorry he wasn’t white and glad he wasn’t black.’ His opponent is the Kid who has ‘a blue-black skin’.²¹¹ Kenny’s arrogance is based on his sense of proximity to ‘whiteness’, and initially he has the crowd’s support for this reason, but the Panther’s superiority turns the crowd against him, particularly when it sees Kenny’s blood. By the end of the story, when the Panther knocks out Kenny, the latter’s lips resemble ‘a couple of polonies’ so that his own face has acquired features of the caricatured ‘blackness’ he despises and which La Guma had caricatured in episodes 31-33 of *Little Libby*. There La Guma depicts an African car thief with exaggerated lips.²¹² Just as he had done with his articles on Johannesburg and ‘die Kaffir Koning,’ La Guma used the one device for two purposes – to criticise and to parody.

In this short story La Guma also introduces an element of pugilistic and cinematic parody which points to his interest in and criticisms of American popular culture. The narrator compares Kenny to “Gentleman Jim Corbett himself”.²¹³ Corbett was the first world heavyweight champion under Queensbury Rules. Widely regarded as the first ‘scientific’ boxer – unlike Kenny who underestimates his

opponent and fights in an uncontrolled manner – he was the subject of 1942 film entitled *Gentleman Jim* with Errol Flynn in the title role.²¹⁴ In this short story, La Guma does not attack the notion of coloured identity, but he does criticise the idea of racial hierarchies which place white above black and which were common in South Africa and in the world of American boxing. During the early years of the twentieth century there were several occasions when white boxers refused to fight against African-American opponents, though Corbett was not among them.

A comparison between this short story and his longer works from this period indicates that La Guma had more than one view on the issue of hierarchies and racism. Where *A Walk in the Night* displays shifts between a dispassionate and a critical position – thereby acknowledging racial consciousness as real but false – *And a Threefold Cord* assumes actual hierarchies of intellect and political consciousness. The distinction between and within racial consciousness and political consciousness is the basis for irony in his writing and a condition – but not a guarantee – of the development of political awareness in some of his characters. It is also the basis for La Guma's distinction between the proletariat as 'the working class' and as 'class and politically conscious people', and one of the reasons why he could tolerate and use irony in his literary treatment of coloured working-class figures but reject any deviation by his colleagues from the correct political position.²¹⁵ At the same time, while rejecting racial hierarchies as false, La Guma tended to articulate his criticisms of political backwardness and his fears of downward adaptation in racial terms. In *And a Threefold Cord* this was partly explained by the way in which he dealt with expressions of grief and mourning. When we deal with *The Stone Country* we shall see that perceptions of sexuality oppose notions of political development and solidarity.²¹⁶

'A Christmas Story', 'A Glass of Wine' and 'At the Portagee's' combine the features of a sketch and a short story. Reflecting on his own work at that time, La Guma's contemporary James Matthews felt that he himself needed to progress beyond sketches, which had 'only one thing to recommend them: the authenticity of their setting'.²¹⁷ 'Tattoo Marks and Nails', which appeared one year after 'At the

Portagee's', suggests that La Guma could meet Matthews' criteria and that he had become 'capable of developing characters, not just depicting situations'. By then his work on *Jimmy* had made him more conscious of the relationship between character development, narrative strategy and of the relationship between main and subsidiary narratives within one story.²¹⁸ 'Tattoo Marks and Nails' does not represent an advance because it contains a story within a story and has a more educated and literate narrator – he had already used these techniques seven years earlier in 'Out of Darkness' – but because its story is more complex and its ending is both plot-driven and inconclusive. La Guma's narrator, who does not say why he is in jail, strikes up a conversation with Ahmed the Turk who tells him about a Coloured Corps Prisoner of War in a desert prisoner-of-war camp. This prisoner cheated his fellow prisoners out of their water rations. When they discover his deception they hold their own trial and carve a message on his chest with "a kind of knife made from a six-inch flattened nail... while he's struggling and screaming: PRIVATE SO-AND-SO, A CHEAT AND A COWARD. And the joker got to carry these words around with him long as he lives."²¹⁹ The proceedings of a prison 'trial' conducted by The Creature run parallel to this prisoner story-within-a-story and constantly distract the Turk and the narrator. The Creature is trying to find the person who killed his brother Nails, but the only clue he has is Nails' description of his killer's tattoo. Gradually the Turk's story and the Creature's 'trial' converge for two related reasons: the challenge that the Turk represents to The Creature's authority in the cell, and the fact that despite the heat the Turk does not remove his shirt. At the end the Turk is about to remove his shirt but the reader is left guessing which tattoo he has on his chest – the dragon which will prove that he killed Nails or the nail marks which prove that he remains "A CHEAT AND A COWARD". However, there is a strong indication that it is the latter because the Turk uses the same expletives – "The hell with you" – in his story of the cheat and coward as he does when The Creature demands that he remove his shirt.²²⁰

In his short stories La Guma relied heavily on the technique of the story-within-a-story. Four of these – 'A Christmas Story', 'Out of Darkness', 'Tattoo Marks and

Nails' and 'Colour Blind' – foreground this technique. Shakespeare features in La Guma's accounts of his personal reading history, and for Chandramohan *Hamlet* is La Guma's prime source for the 'technique of using a story within a story'.²²¹ Taking his lead from Couzens, who saw the link between *Hamlet* and *A Walk in the Night* in their 'uneasy alliance of sordid social critique and literary medium' – a point also made by Coetzee – Chandramohan argues that *Hamlet* 'influenced La Guma's portrayal of South African society'.²²² Another five stories – 'A Glass of Wine,' 'The Gladiators', 'A Matter of Taste', 'At the Portage's' and 'Battle for Honour' – have in common a narrator who is part of the action and retells the events. 'Etude' and his last three from this period – 'Blankets', 'Coffee for the Road' and 'The Lemon Orchard' – all have an omniscient third-person narrator, but where 'Etude' has an omniscient third-person narrator who presents a linear narrative and explains details to his audience, the other three display the influence of non-realist forms of representation and place greater emphasis on the control and release of information. This does not mean that La Guma had discarded the technique of the story-within-the-story. The last novel he wrote before he left South Africa relies heavily on this technique.

With 'Out of Darkness' and 'Tattoo Marks and Nails' the denouement depends on the past intruding on the present, just as it does when Willieboy recalls childhood beatings as he dies in the back of the police van. This suggests that from a relatively early stage in his fictional writing career La Guma was interested in experiences of time and memory within a narrative controlled by an omniscient narrator, and he could only incorporate them in the form of fantasies or delirium induced by trauma. The narrative styles associated with this technique are primarily realism and, to a lesser degree, naturalism. Even in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* – a later, more complex narrative written under the destabilising conditions of exile in modern and foreign London – we find that La Guma continues to rely on external devices – evident in his references to 'the time-machine of memory' – to broach and explore his main protagonist's experiences of time and memory.²²³

If critics are divided on whether La Guma was influenced by naturalism, there has been no consideration of modernism's potential influence. In the 1960s Mphahlele described La Guma as a social realist and a 'self-avowed Marxist who writes...like Gorki and the American Negro... You know he wants to demonstrate the wickedness of a social system in which the black man is trapped.'²²⁴ The links which he establishes between La Guma's literary influences and political intentions are plausible and persuasive, but they should not blind us to the possibility that La Guma was open to and experimented with other literary styles, without self-consciously adopting the characteristics of a particular genre. This is the implication of Nkosi's praise for *A Walk in the Night's* 'distinct Dostoevskian undertones'.²²⁵

Marxism and modernism have had a complicated relationship. The *Manifesto of the Communist Party* clearly associates capitalist expansion with the end of national literature and culture and the development of a modern international literature:

In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literature, there arises a world literature.²²⁶

Theorists and philosophers such as Benjamin, Adorno and Sartre have explored their common ground. On the other hand, Soviet Marxism, with its emphasis on stages, the formation of socialism in one country and the development of national literatures, has rejected it, arguing, that the only international literature was proletarian literature. This is the implication of La Guma's observation about London and Tressell that he saw in their work his 'own community ground down under the weight of poverty, oppression, ignorance', and his rhetorical question: 'Could it be that oppressed people all over were the same?'²²⁷

Another, closely related reason why critics have rejected or not considered the idea that La Guma may have been influenced by both naturalism and modernism lies with the influence of Lukács on La Guma criticism. At a time when Marxist literary criticism was more fashionable than it is now, this criticism, like all critical schools, found the literary objects that most closely approximated its own principles and assumptions. Lukács' criticisms to naturalism and modernism and La Guma's assertions that art had to serve the cause of liberation and his support for the Soviet Union – where naturalism and modernism found little official favour – created the conditions for an approach to his work in which questions about these styles would receive little attention. Lukács' objections to naturalism and modernism and the Lukácsian tendency of much La Guma criticism, has made it difficult for critics to explore the possibility that La Guma could have been open to or experimented with non-realist literary styles, demonstrated the injustices of apartheid and remained politically active. The assumption here is that naturalism emerged at a time when literature had become a commodity and writers had become 'specialists in the craft of writing, writers in the sense of the capitalist division of labour'. Therefore the naturalist writer observes and records life in minute detail, acknowledges its social and political failures but remains detached.²²⁸ The result is an atomised and pessimistic view of the world. For the proponent of realism this may be a loss and limitation, but it also offers new experiences and other ways of writing. It makes possible greater attention to the appearance of objects, the nature of perception and to altered states of consciousness.²²⁹ We can see this in the way in which La Guma includes long lists of objects, the way in which his interest in painting and the cinema (manifest in his descriptive use of colour and light) influenced his description of District Six in *A Walk in the Night* and his characters' unattainable fantasies.

Of the two versions of 'Blankets', the first is shorter.²³⁰ Choker has been stabbed in the back three times. He has been carried off the street and placed in a dirty lean-to. While he waits for the ambulance to arrive, somebody throws 'an old blanket' over him. This sets in motion a series of associations: blankets in prison where the warder denied him the 'thickest and warmest', and gave him blankets

which were 'filthy and smelly'; the 'thin cotton blanket' which he and his older brother Willie shared and fought over; the blanket which covers him and 'the woman' who resists his demands for sex; the blanket 'thick and new and warm' that covers him as the ambulance takes him to hospital.²³¹ This story shares elements with *A Walk in the Night* and *The Stone Country*. *Black Orpheus* published it a year after La Guma began work on his third novel.²³² 'Blankets' and *The Stone Country* share descriptions of prison life, particularly the relationship between warder and prisoner, and the presence of a strong, brutal convict. In this short story and *A Walk in the Night* La Guma has used delirium induced by loss of blood as a literary device. In both cases little pain accompanies a delirium which enables the narrator to create the impression of a consciousness whose flow of associations is determined by external stimuli such as the jolting police van in the novella or the wail of a siren in the short story. Its reliance on Choker's consciousness requires him to remain alive until the end. It is this reliance on consciousness, the play on time and memory through the ordering of events and the ambiguity of the ending – Choker is placed in the ambulance and driven away without any hint of his fate – which indicates the influence of modernism.

From the perspective of much Marxist literary theory, modernism is a decadent, self-reflexive art form espoused by those with no interest in the 'real' world. Nkosi interpreted this for an African context when he argued that in Africa, modernism was the response of the alienated intelligentsia to the political, ideological and economic problems and crises associated with the post-colonial era. This led to 'the objectification of the growing split between "literary intellectuals" and the ruling bureaucracies'.²³³ On a superficial reading none of this could apply to La Guma: he was not writing in a post-colonial context, and he produced resistance literature about and for the people. Nkosi's comment that 'writers whose works are created from the perspective of the struggle of the people for social justice will always have an inner buoyancy and hope denied the writer who feels himself entirely isolated from the people' might serve to demonstrate La Guma's distance from naturalism and modernism, but on another reading it suggests that naturalism, modernism and

creation 'from the perspective of the struggle' are compatible, for his reference to the post colonial 'ruling bureaucracies' would make what Berman calls the 'modernism of underdevelopment' an innovative literary and political force.²³⁴

Nkosi appears to construct the context of African modernism out of extremes. His statement acknowledges that banning or house arrest might impose physical isolation but that this is distinct from the writer's own sense of proximity to the people. In *And a Threefold Cord*, La Guma borrowed from Steinbeck to express his desire for proximity to the people and to work through personal experiences of loss. A comparison with the short stories that La Guma published at this time suggests that a writer could respond to the experience of isolation in different ways by drawing on different literary and political traditions. Later I shall argue that short stories like 'The Lemon Orchard' and 'Coffee for the Road' – which rely partly on modernist techniques – suggest a stronger sense of isolation, but that this did not prevent him from advancing the perspective of the struggle.

Another reason why critics might not wish to associate La Guma with modernism is based on arguments about the links between modernism and racism. Here the idea is that through the appropriation of a primitive black 'other', late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century artists such as Manet, Picasso or Conrad could gain access to a 'system of cognition' that was not limited by bourgeois realism and rationalism.²³⁵ While this might stand as a critique of the way in which La Guma represented primitive figures such as Choker in 'Blankets' or Roman in *And a Threefold Cord* or Butcherboy Williams in *The Stone Country*, it could also be part of what Gikandi regards as a desire to 'affirm and sustain...the incomplete project of "black modernity"'.²³⁶ La Guma encountered its literary and political expressions in District Six during the late 1930s and early 1940s through the Liberman Centre's library, the poetry and prose by Hughes, Johnson, Rogers and Robeson that appeared in *The Liberator*, and through Ziervogel's book exhibition.

At the time of its emergence literary modernism represented a departure from established, mostly realist, modes of representation. According to Lodge modernist texts paid greater attention to the inner workings of the subject by evoking the

'subconscious and unconscious workings of the human mind'.²³⁷ Another feature of the modernist text is that it does not have an identifiable beginning and requires the reader to work out the order of events and the significance of relationships. From this it follows that the modernist text is less likely to have a stable omniscient narrator who orders the material in a linear and accessible chronology or who intervenes to inform the reader of any deviation from this 'ideal' ordering.²³⁸

La Guma was not drawn to 'high Euro-American modernism' but to the modernism of Ernest Hemingway. We have already seen that La Guma referred to the Donne epigraph in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* during the Treason Trial, and that he quoted from the epigraph at Lionel Forman's funeral. Later, among the works he wrote in exile, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* was clearly an influence on *Time of the Butcherbird* and *A Soviet Journey*. He quoted from it in order to describe women whom he met in the central Asian Soviet republics.²³⁹ He also wrote 'The Spear', an undated and unpublished prose version of Hemingway's play 'To-day is Friday'.²⁴⁰ This suggests that the political opinions in certain Hemingway works – for instance Robert Jordan's view that 'He was under Communist discipline for the duration of the war. Here in Spain the Communists offered the best discipline and the soundest and sanest for the prosecution of the war' – resonated with La Guma, and that Hemingway's literary style influenced him.²⁴¹ As was the case with Steinbeck, La Guma drew on those aspects of Hemingway's work that helped him to articulate his own circumstances and to express his literary and political goals.

'The Lemon Orchard' and 'Coffee for the Road' provide clear examples of Hemingway's influence. Their plots are similar. In both cases a single individual – a coloured school teacher in the former and an Indian mother in the latter – placed in an unfamiliar and hostile rural setting challenges the norms and laws of apartheid and encounters retribution from reactionary whites. The stories also share stylistic features. In both cases La Guma does not name the main character. Initially in 'The Lemon Orchard' La Guma refers to 'The men', establishing collectivity and anonymity; then he divides them but still retains their anonymity by referring to 'All of the men but one' and 'One of the men'.²⁴² Dialogue establishes opinion and

attitude, and this enables La Guma to distinguish the 'one' man as coloured and to show why 'the men' dragged him from his bed and brought him to the orchard, and how little they value the lives of black South Africans.²⁴³ As the story unfolds, features of Hemingway's style – the controlled anonymity of the characters, the repetition of phrases and the short sentences – drop away. A directly stated political message – the type of abstraction that Hemingway sought to avoid – takes centre stage as the conversation between the Afrikaner farmers contextualises the events and carries them forward.²⁴⁴ Much the same happens in 'Coffee for the Road', which indicates the influence of Hemingway's depictions of women. According to Devost:

the references to the women in much of Hemingway's work are common nouns that, along with their modifiers, pinpoint a woman's place in a relationship, with these references remaining static or changing depending upon how a given conflict unfolds during the course of a story. These references become mirrors of the conflicts in which the women find themselves.²⁴⁵

Throughout this story La Guma uses only common nouns – 'the mother' and 'the woman' – to name his protagonist. He switches between these descriptions in order to influence the reader's perceptions of her. As she approaches the café in order to fill her thermos flask with coffee for her children, she is 'the mother'.²⁴⁶ La Guma renders the café virtually empty, and this heightens the contrast between 'the woman' who enters and the 'broad, heavy woman in a green smock who thumbed through a little stack of accounts', for they are both 'women' until the latter registers 'the colour of the other woman'. When the 'broad heavy woman' orders 'the brown, tired, handsome Indian face with its smart sunglasses, and the city cut of the tan suit' to the 'foot-square hole where non-Whites were served', she becomes 'the mother' again while the 'broad, heavy' figure remains 'the woman'.²⁴⁷ Then when the 'broad, heavy woman' calls her "'a bedamned *coolie* girl'" she throws the

flask and becomes the 'dark woman'. Like Michael Adonis, she responds in kind, calling her adversary "'Bloody white trash'", and like Adonis she too becomes a nameless and denigrated figure whom the policeman recognises as the "'darkie girl with brown suit and sun-glasses"' .²⁴⁸

In this story the woman in the café and the policeman recognise her through a chain of associations that bring together their fears and prejudices. La Guma writes that the eyes of the 'heavy woman' in the café 'started in horror'. The fears and prejudices which she and the policeman share establish her as 'other' – everything that they are not: her urban and mobile life and their rural and limited experience; her sophistication and refinement and their crassness and crudity; their desire to control and contain and her refusal to accept limitations.²⁴⁹

If these stories share stylistic features such as limited characterisation and a clear movement towards a political explanation for the circumstances, there is less consensus about their literary merit. In 'The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa', Ndebele proposes that 'the ordinary day-to-day lives of people should be the direct focus of political interest because they constitute the *very content* of the struggle, for the struggle involves people not abstractions'. He contrasts this with 'spectacular' South African writing. Using 'Coffee for the Road' as an example, he argues that it is devoid of 'subtlety' and 'causality' and is characterised by the '*ritualistic* enactment' of 'glaring contrasts'.²⁵⁰ The end result is 'the transformation of objective reality into conventional tropes which become the predominant means by which objective reality is artistically ritualised'.²⁵¹ Ndebele's is not a serious assessment of La Guma's fiction. Pieces such as 'A Christmas Story', 'Etude', 'A Glass of Wine' or 'The Gladiators' are about 'ordinary day-to-day lives' that 'constitute the *very content* of the struggle'. The fact that Ndebele chose 'Coffee for the Road' because it enabled him to problematise earlier literature and situate and justify his own position does not remove any of the limitations of 'Coffee for the Road' and 'The Lemon Orchard'. It *is* possible to argue that their brevity combined with their use of common nouns and 'othering' renders their political message in an unnecessarily abstract or simplistic form. But this is only one

side of the story, for abstraction is a process with political and literary implications that can take forms such as the common noun or metonymy. In 'Coffee for the Road' and 'The Lemon Orchard' La Guma politicises everyday relationships by using common nouns – a literary rendition of abstraction – rather than the metaphoric 'scenes of representation' in *A Walk in the Night*. In 'Blankets' he uses metonymy – another form of abstraction – to establish chains of association induced by delirium. In effect, Ndebele's advocacy of the 'ordinary' overlooks nuanced aspects of La Guma's work.

Martin Trump has argued convincingly that in 'A Matter of Taste' La Guma 'manages to avoid some of the rather rigid determinisms of Marxist class analysis'. In preceding chapters I have argued that La Guma's explorations of the contradictory dynamics of coloured identity suggest a more subtle, angry, ironic and at times contradictory approach to literature and politics than Ndebele's purposes allow himself to acknowledge.²⁵² Ndebele criticises the story because only '[w]hat matters is what is seen'.²⁵³ With no less than twenty-three instances of simile, 'Coffee for the Road' is over-reliant on this technique. In longer works such as *A Walk in the Night* extended descriptions precede the similes and set the mood, but in a short story this preparation is seldom possible.²⁵⁴ However if the short discussion between the two children on the back seat about this literary device is any guide then La Guma had no regrets about its use, and uses it to stress differences:

"Look at that hill," the boy, Ray, cried. "It looks like a face."
 "Is it a real face?" Zaida asked, peering out.
 "Don't be silly," Ray answered. "How can it be a real face? It just
looks like a face."²⁵⁵

Through them La Guma is saying that he wishes to separate the object from that with which he compares it. From La Guma's perspective there were good reasons for doing so. One of La Guma's favoured literary devices, simile evokes comparison and ensures that whatever 'it' is 'like', the object or process never changes. As

Hemingway's short story 'Hills Like White Elephants' suggests, simile and modernism are not incompatible provided that the former evokes something unspoken, such as a thought or a stream of consciousness.²⁵⁶ By contrast, Ndebele sees political issues in abstract terms, otherwise he would not feel the need to give them content. In so doing, his criticism of La Guma shows that it is easy to overlook the modernist aspects of La Guma's work. In this instance, La Guma has drawn on a recognised feature of Hemingway's work. He would aim to depict a character as observed by others, but the choice of words used to denote that character would describe her or him 'from within'.²⁵⁷

Several critics have argued that Hemingway tried to combine the features of different and sometimes opposing literary genres. According to Lodge, 'Hemingway wanted to be both a realist and a modernist' at the same time; for Vaughn Hemingway 'participates in the realist tradition' and challenges the 'assumptions about reality on which realism is based'; Beegle sees in 'The Undefeated' naturalism and a 'more romantic' point of view.²⁵⁸ For these critics, Hemingway displays these features simultaneously. In La Guma's case these features appear consecutively. If short stories like 'Coffee for the Road' are unsatisfactory, it is because they lack stylistic coherence, not because they are too obviously political. La Guma's direct and indirect references to Hemingway provide sufficient evidence that he was drawn to his writing. The shifts in 'The Lemon Orchard' and 'Coffee for the Road' from features associated with Hemingway to a more familiar and politicised realism suggest that, just as La Guma experimented with different forms of graphic representation, so in the realm of literary representation, he also experimented with or drew on different literary styles and genres, though his primary allegiance was to realism. In the next chapter, we shall see that he continued these experiments under increasingly difficult personal circumstances.

This is a book that Seven Seas Books does not hesitate to call extraordinary — for it is as real as life itself: full of the sadness, the laughter, the struggle, the poverty, the hate, the search for forgetfulness which apartheid engenders . . . Yet it sings with hope and determination and the courage that distinguishes those whom apartheid seeks to oppress. It is a novel woven out of the facts of life, a story told with compassion and profound love for his people by a man whose literary talent is equal to the story he tells. And there is poetry in his writing as Charlie Paul, his hero, finds a place — for his family and himself — in the struggle for freedom.

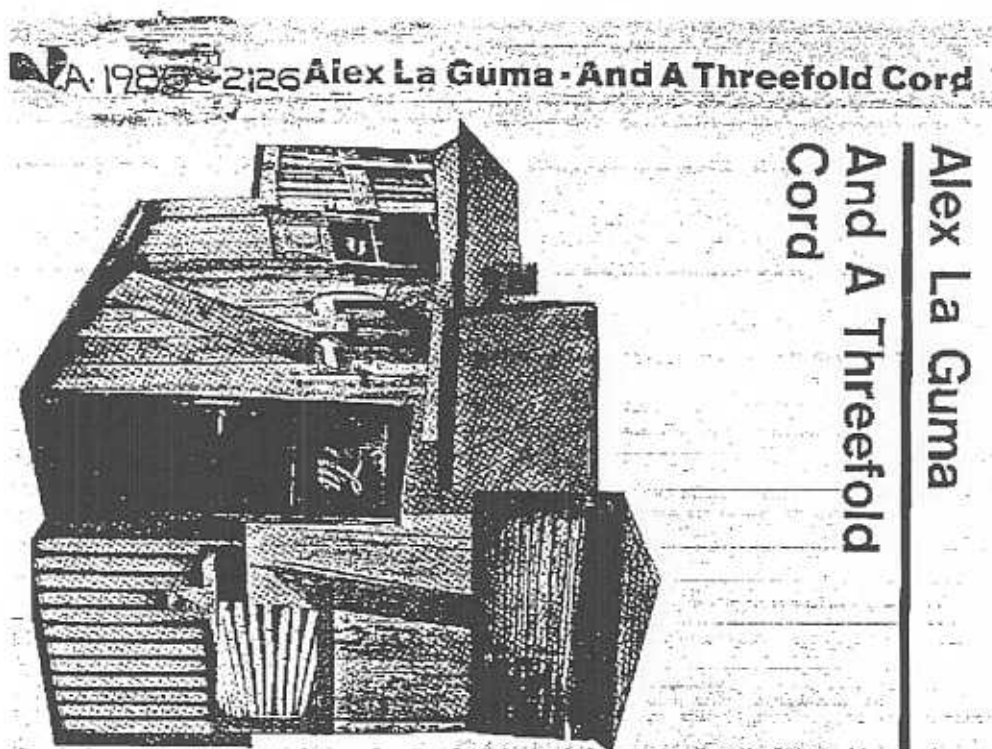


Fig. 6.1: Cover of Seven Seas edition of *And a Threefold Cord* (Source: National Library of South Africa)

Endnotes

- ¹ T.G. Karis and G.M. Carter (eds), *From Protest to Challenge*. Vol. V Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1979 (Unisa Press, Pretoria, 1997), p. 14.
- ² B. Bunting, Preface, in A. la Guma, *And a Threefold Cord* (Kliptown, London, 1988) p. v.
- ³ *Post*, 10 May 1964.
- ⁴ *Cape Times*, 6 May 1964.
- ⁵ B. la Guma, interviews.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ B. la Guma, 'A Wife's Memory', p. 12; *Cape Argus*, 6 December 1963.
- ⁹ B. la Guma, interviews; the Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection, undated press clips (probably December 1962).
- ¹⁰ The Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection, letter from U. Beier to A. la Guma, undated.
- ¹¹ C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, pp. 15, 69-70.
- ¹² C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, pp. 69-70; Geheime Omsend Brief No. 4 van 1960, Departement van Gevangenis, Pretoria, 14 April 1960.
- ¹³ R. Rive, *African Songs* (Seven Seas, Berlin, 1963).
- ¹⁴ R. Rive, *Writing Black* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1981), p. 18.
- ¹⁵ B. Bunting, Preface, p. v; the Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection, undated press clips.
- ¹⁶ B. la Guma, interviews.
- ¹⁷ *Post*, 10 May 1964.
- ¹⁸ A. la Guma, 'The Real Picture', p. 25.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24-25.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.
- ²¹ J. Mkhize, "'Road to Consciousness": *And a Threefold Cord* and *The Stone Country*', *Alternation*, 5, 2 (1998), p. 148.
- ²² La Guma, quoted in Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. 72.
- ²³ La Guma, *And a Threefold Cord*, pp. 1, 19, 38, 76.
- ²⁴ J. Western, *Outcast Cape Town* (Human and Rousseau, Cape Town, 1981), pp. 117-118.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*; K. Balutansky, *The Novels of Alex La Guma*, p. 39.
- ²⁶ *Cape Standard*, 15 August 1939, 22 August 1939.
- ²⁷ *Cape Standard*, 31 October 1939, 14 April 1942, 15 June 1943, 4 January 1944.
- ²⁸ *Cape Standard*, 20 February 1945.
- ²⁹ *Cape Standard*, 26 June 1945, 5 April 1946; *The Guardian*, 19 August 1946.
- ³⁰ *Cape Standard*, 12 April 1946.
- ³¹ *New Age*, 30 January 1958.
- ³² S. Field, 'Ambiguous Belongings: Negotiating Hybridity in Cape Town, 1940s-1990s', *Kronos: Journal of Cape History*, 25 (1998), p. 227.
- ³³ *New Age*, 28 November 1957; La Guma, *And a Threefold Cord*, pp. 85, 88.
- ³⁴ La Guma, 'Trying Time', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 102.
- ³⁵ Gala [A. la Guma, pseud.], 'Doing Something Useful', p. 49.
- ³⁶ For some reason neither La Guma nor the editors of the first edition included these terms in their glossary.
- ³⁷ B. la Guma, 'A child is born', *New Age*, 2 August 1956; B. la Guma, interviews.
- ³⁸ B. la Guma, 'A child is born'; La Guma, *And a Threefold Cord*, pp. 95-98.
- ³⁹ B. la Guma, 'A child is born'.
- ⁴⁰ B. la Guma, 'A child is born'; La Guma, *And a Threefold Cord*, p. 64.
- ⁴¹ See J.M. Coetzee, 'Man's Fate in the Novels of Alex la Guma', p. 358; A. Roscoe, *Uhuru's Fire: African Literature East to South* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977) p. 247; G.

- Moore, *Twelve African Writers* (Hutchinson, London, 1980) p. 107; A.R. JanMohamed, 'Alex La Guma: the Literary and Political Functions of Marginality in the Colonial Situation', *Boundary -2: A Journal of Postmodern Literature and Culture*, 11, 1-2, 1982-1983, pp. 278-279.
- ⁴² W. Carpenter, 'The Scene of Representation in Alex La Guma's Later Novels', *English in Africa*, 18, 2 (October 1981); W. Carpenter, "'Ovals, Spheres, Ellipses, and Sundry Bulges": Alex La Guma Imagines the Human Body', *Research in African Literatures*, 22, 4, 1992, pp. 80, 95.
- ⁴³ J. Mkhize, 'Social Realism in Alex la Guma's Longer Fiction', p. 37.
- ⁴⁴ Mkhize, "'Road to Consciousness"', pp. 157, 154.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 153, 149-150, 154-155, 111; Balutansky, *The Novels of Alex La Guma*, p. 41.
- ⁴⁶ La Guma, *And a Threefold Cord*, p. 38.
- ⁴⁷ J.M. Coetzee, 'Alex la Guma and the Responsibilities of the South African Writer', *Journal of the New African Literature and the Arts*, 9-10 (1971), p. 10.
- ⁴⁸ La Guma, 'What I Learned from Maxim Gorky', *Lotus: Afro-Asian Writings*, 34 (1977), pp. 164-168; B. Chandramohan, *A Study in Trans-Ethnicity*, pp. 27-29; J. Mkhize, 'Alex la Guma's Politics and Aesthetics', *Alternation*, 5, 1, 1998, pp. 151-155.
- ⁴⁹ Y. Slavutych, 'Ernest Hemingway in Ukrainian Literature', in W.T. Zyla and W.W. Aycock (eds), *Modern American Fiction: Insights and Foreign Lights* (Texas Tech Press, Lubock, 1972), p. 71.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁵¹ K. Rosen (ed.), *Hemingway Repossessed* (Praeger, Westport, 1994).
- ⁵² V. Klima, *South African Prose Writing in English*, p. 146.
- ⁵³ Coetzee, 'Man's Fate', p. 345.
- ⁵⁴ W. Carpenter, 'The Scene of Representation', p. 5; K. Balutansky, *The Novels of Alex La Guma*, p. 34.
- ⁵⁵ C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, pp. 5-6; Dr Irwin Combrinck, interview.
- ⁵⁶ *The Guardian*, 1 May 1941.
- ⁵⁷ A. la Guma, 'The Real Picture', pp. 21-22;
- ⁵⁸ C. Pletsch, 'On the Autobiographical Life of Nietzsche', in G. Moraitis and G. H. Pollock (eds), *Psychoanalytic Studies of Biography* (International Universities Press, Madison, 1987), pp. 407-408.
- ⁵⁹ C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*; La Guma, 'What I Learned from Maxim Gorky'; La Guma, 'To Literary Gazette' and 'Culture and Liberation', in C. Abrahams (ed.), *Memories of Home*, pp. 37-42, 51-62;
- ⁶⁰ H. Jünger (ed.), *The Literatures of the Soviet Peoples* (Frederick Ungar, New York, 1970), pp. v, 434.
- ⁶¹ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973), p. 383.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 384; *And a Threefold Cord*, p. 111.
- ⁶³ *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 384; *And a Threefold Cord*, p. 55.
- ⁶⁴ *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 384.
- ⁶⁵ *And a Threefold Cord*, pp. 50, 55.
- ⁶⁶ *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 88; *And a Threefold Cord*, p. 54.
- ⁶⁷ *And a Threefold Cord*, pp. 43-44.
- ⁶⁸ *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 406; *And a Threefold Cord*, p. 98.
- ⁶⁹ *The Grapes of Wrath*, pp. 401-408; *And a Threefold Cord* pp. 95-98.
- ⁷⁰ *The Grapes of Wrath*, pp. 127-133; *And a Threefold Cord*, pp. 66-70, 73-77.
- ⁷¹ *The Grapes of Wrath*, pp. 124, 129.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 127.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 129; *And a Threefold Cord*, p. 70.
- ⁷⁴ J. Steinbeck, *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* (Pan Books, London, 1960), pp. 208, 220, 303, 316.
- ⁷⁵ D. Cassuto, 'Turning Wine into Water: Water as Privileged Signifier in *The Grapes of Wrath*', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 29, 1 (1993), p. 3; R. Hinton, 'Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*', *Explicator*, 56, 2, 1998, p. 1; P. Lisca, 'The Dynamics of Community in *The Grapes of*

Wrath', in M. Deakin and P. Lisca (eds), *From Irving to Steinbeck* (University of Florida Press, Gainesville, 1972), pp. 127-140.

⁷⁶ *The Grapes of Wrath*, pp. 403-405.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 415.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

⁷⁹ *And a Threefold Cord*, pp. 67, 110.

⁸⁰ *The Grapes of Wrath*, pp. 114-117.

⁸¹ *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 117; *And a Threefold Cord*, pp. 37-8; P. McCarthy, 'House and Shelter as Symbol in *The Grapes of Wrath*', *South Dakota Review*, 5, 4, 1967, p. 57.

⁸² *The Grapes of Wrath*, pp. 114-5; *And a Threefold Cord*, p. 39; *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 117; *And a Threefold Cord*, p. 36.

⁸³ A. la Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, p. 25.

⁸⁴ *And a Threefold Cord*, pp. 36, 38, 39.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 36.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 49, 106.

⁸⁷ *And a Threefold Cord*, p. 38.

⁸⁸ P. McCarthy, 'House and Shelter as Symbol in *The Grapes of Wrath*', pp. 49-50.

⁸⁹ *The Grapes of Wrath*, pp. 221-222.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 224-225.

⁹² *And a Threefold Cord*, pp. 17-20.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 12.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 59, 60, 82, 83.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 21, 19.

⁹⁸ T. Youngs, 'White apes at the *fin de siècle*', in T. Youngs (ed.), *Writing and Race* (Longman, London, 1997), p. 167.

⁹⁹ *And a Threefold Cord*, p. 64.

¹⁰⁰ C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. 72; D. Cassuto, 'Turning Wine into Water', p. 1.

¹⁰¹ D. Cassuto, 'Turning Wine into Water', p. 2.

¹⁰² *The Grapes of Wrath*, pp. 396-398.

¹⁰³ *And a Threefold Cord*: for grey, see pp. 1, 9, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 25, 27, 33, 37, 45, 47, 73, 75, 80, 87, 98, 101, 109, 110; for black, see pp. 1, 3, 6, 9, 19, 23, 25, 27, 32, 36, 37, 44, 61, 66, 73, 75, 76, 80; for yellow, see pp. 16, 20, 23, 31, 34, 42, 48, 53, 56, 81, 90, 91, 92.

¹⁰⁴ La Guma, *And a Threefold Cord*, p. 100; Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 414.

¹⁰⁵ *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 396; *And a Threefold Cord*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 320.

¹⁰⁷ N. Visser, 'Audience and Closure in *The Grapes of Wrath*', *Studies in American Fiction*, 22, 1, 1994.

¹⁰⁸ N. Visser, 'Audience and Closure', p. 20; M.E. Caldwell, 'A New Consideration of the Intercalary Chapters in *The Grapes of Wrath*', *Markham Review*, 3, 1973, p. 115.

¹⁰⁹ N. Visser, 'Audience and Closure', p. 22.

¹¹⁰ *And a Threefold Cord*, p. 2.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 298-302.

¹¹² M.E. Caldwell, 'A New Consideration of the Intercalary Chapters', p. 115.

¹¹³ La Guma, 'The Machine', *Fighting Talk*, October 1956, pp. 8-9; La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 11-12.

¹¹⁴ *And a Threefold Cord*, p. 78.

¹¹⁵ J. Mkhize, "'Road to Consciousness'", p. 149, fn. 2.

¹¹⁶ P. Lisca, 'The Dynamics of Community in *The Grapes of Wrath*', p. 128.

¹¹⁷ *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 384; N. Visser, 'Audience and Closure', p. 29.

¹¹⁸ *And a Threefold Cord*, pp. 49-50.

- ¹¹⁹ *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 139; *New Age*, 21 June 1962.
- ¹²⁰ *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 139.
- ¹²¹ *New Age*, 21 June 1962 and 28 June 1962.
- ¹²² N. Visser, 'Audience and Closure', p. 31.
- ¹²³ *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 26.
- ¹²⁴ A. la Guma, *Time of the Butcherbird*, p. 119.
- ¹²⁵ *And a Threefold Cord*, pp. 76, 112, 111.
- ¹²⁶ A. la Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, p. 96.
- ¹²⁷ See also D. Rabkin, 'Drum Magazine 1951-1961 and the works of Black South African Writers associated with it', p. 221.
- ¹²⁸ N. Visser, 'Audience and Closure', p. 19.
- ¹²⁹ J. Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*.
- ¹³⁰ *And a Threefold Cord*, p. 111 [emphasis in original].
- ¹³¹ K. Balutansky, *The Novels of Alex La Guma*, p. 53.
- ¹³² *And a Threefold Cord*, pp. 66, 67, 76.
- ¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- ¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 359; W. Carpenter, "'Ovals, Spheres, Ellipses and Sundry Bulges'", p. 88.
- ¹³⁵ D.W. Winnicott, 'Fear of breakdown', in G. Kohon (ed.), *The British School of Psychoanalysis: the Independent Tradition* (Free Association Books, London, 1986), p. 174.
- ¹³⁶ *And a Threefold Cord*, p. 58.
- ¹³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 86.
- ¹³⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 91-98.
- ¹⁴¹ S. Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', in S. Freud, *On Metapsychology* (Penguin, London, 1991), p. 258; C. Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis and the Unthought Known* (Free Association Books, London, 1987).
- ¹⁴² J.M. Coetzee, 'Alex la Guma and the Responsibilities of the South African Writer', p. 10; W. Carpenter, 'The Scene of Representation', p. 5.
- ¹⁴³ S. Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (Hogarth Press, London, 1979), p. 2.
- ¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴⁵ S. Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', p. 252.
- ¹⁴⁶ M. Klein, 'Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive-States', in J. Mitchell (ed.), *The Essential Melanie Klein*, pp. 163-4, 174; C. Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, p. 70; *And a Threefold Cord*, dedication page.
- ¹⁴⁷ A. la Guma, 'On a Wedding Day', in C. Abrahams (ed.) *Memories of Home*, pp. 81-95.
- ¹⁴⁸ C. Abrahams, note to 'On a Wedding Day', p. 81.
- ¹⁴⁹ M. Adhikari, *James La Guma*.
- ¹⁵⁰ A. la Guma, 'Jimmy La Guma: A Biography' (James La Guma Memorial Committee, Cape Town, 1964), p. i; C. Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, p. ix.
- ¹⁵¹ *New Age*, 3 August 1961, 24 August 1961, 29 March 1962.
- ¹⁵² Ray Alexander, interview, 23 June 1963; M. Adhikari, 'Introduction' to A. la Guma, *Jimmy la Guma: A biography* (Friends of the South African Library, Cape Town, 1997), p. 9.
- ¹⁵³ P. Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Pact (bis)', in P. Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, p. 126.
- ¹⁵⁴ La Guma, 'The Real Picture', pp. 24-25.
- ¹⁵⁵ *Post*, 10 May 1964.
- ¹⁵⁶ P. Lejeune, 'The Order of Narrative in Sartre's *Les Mots*', in *On Autobiography*, p. 71.
- ¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 18.
- ¹⁵⁸ F.C. Ball, *One of the Damned* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1973), p. 257.
- ¹⁵⁹ *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 18; La Guma (A. Adams, pseud.), 'Why I Joined the Communist Party', p. 59.
- ¹⁶⁰ La Guma, 'Why I Joined the Communist Party', p. 59.
- ¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

- ¹⁶² *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 17; La Guma (Gala, pseud.), 'Doing Something Useful', pp. 50, 51.
- ¹⁶³ M. Adhikari, 'Introduction' to *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 9.
- ¹⁶⁴ *Jimmy la Guma*, pp. 22-23.
- ¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21, 24-27.
- ¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- ¹⁶⁷ E. Lewis, *Wild Deer* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1984), p. 26.
- ¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 24.
- ¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- ¹⁷⁰ M. Adhikari, 'Introduction', p. 9.
- ¹⁷¹ E. Roux, *Time Longer Than Rope*, p. xii.
- ¹⁷² For La Guma's handling of black responses to the 1922 white miners' strike and Tielman Roos' proposed Sedition Bill, see *Jimmy la Guma*, pp. 25-6 and *Time Longer than Rope*, pp.150-1; for the ICU's support for Hertzog before the Pact electoral victory in 1924, see *Jimmy la Guma*, p. 26 and *Time Longer than Rope*, pp. 202, 183; for the perceived right-wing shift of the ICU, see *Jimmy la Guma*, pp. 28-9 and *Time Longer than Rope*, pp. 160 ff, 202.
- ¹⁷³ P. Lalu, 'Lived Texts, Written Texts and Con-Texts: Eddie Roux and the Making of the South African Past', (University of the Western Cape, M.A. dissertation, 1995), p. 111.
- ¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 123-4.
- ¹⁷⁵ E. Roux, *Time Longer Than Rope*, pp. 4, 10, 11.
- ¹⁷⁶ *Cape Argus*, 11 May 1964; *Post*, 10 May 1964.
- ¹⁷⁷ *Cape Times*, 31 June 1962.
- ¹⁷⁸ Ray Alexander, interview, 23 June 1993; *Jimmy La Guma*, pp. 31-33.
- ¹⁷⁹ J. and R. Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, p. 389.
- ¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸¹ *Jimmy La Guma*, p. 34; J. and R. Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa*, p. 390; *Jimmy La Guma* p. 36
- ¹⁸² *Jimmy La Guma*, pp. 35-51.
- ¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 50.
- ¹⁸⁴ *Class and Colour in South Africa*, p. 408.
- ¹⁸⁵ *Jimmy La Guma*, p. 51.
- ¹⁸⁶ N. Chodorow, 'Family Structure and Feminine Personality', p. 49; A. la Guma, 'The Picture in the Parlour', p. 168; *The Cape Standard*, 24 January 1938.
- ¹⁸⁷ M. Klein, 'Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States', p. 166.
- ¹⁸⁸ *Jimmy La Guma*, p. 58.
- ¹⁸⁹ *Jimmy La Guma*, p. 69.
- ¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 79.
- ¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 71.
- ¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73.
- ¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 71.
- ¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 51; A. la Guma, 'Doing Something Useful', p. 51.
- ¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 74.
- ¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.74, 75.
- ²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 78.
- ²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- ²⁰² Letter from U. Beier to A. la Guma, n.d., in the Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection.
- ²⁰³ *Post*, 10 May 1964; A.R. Yesufu, 'Mbari Publications', pp. 56-57.
- ²⁰⁴ A. Wannenburg, 'Memories of Richard', *New Contrast*, no. 71 (1990), p. 29.
- ²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁰⁶ A. Wannenburg, interview.
- ²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

- ²⁰⁸ C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. 87.
- ²⁰⁹ A. la Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 3-5, 92-93; A. la Guma, 'At the Portagee's', in *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 108-109.
- ²¹⁰ A. la Guma, 'A Matter of Taste', in *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 125-130.
- ²¹¹ See M. Adhikari, "'I'm not black' and 'What's my white got to do with it?': An insider's reading of Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night and Other Stories*", paper presented at the Alex la Guma Colloquium, University of the Western Cape, December 1995; A. la Guma, 'The Gladiators', in *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 114, 117.
- ²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 120; La Guma, in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 92-94.
- ²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 116.
- ²¹⁴ N. Giller and N. Duncanson, *Crown of Thorns: The Bitter History of a Century's Heavyweight Championship Boxing* (Boxtree, London, 1992), pp. 18-19.
- ²¹⁵ La Guma, 'Doing Something Useful', p. 50.
- ²¹⁶ W. Carpenter "'Ovals, Spheres, Ellipses and Sundry Bulges'", p. 88.
- ²¹⁷ J. Matthews, *The Party is Over* (Kwela Books, Cape Town, 1997), p. 47.
- ²¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²¹⁹ La Guma, 'Tattoo Marks and Nails', in *A Walk in the Night*, p. 104.
- ²²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 103, 106.
- ²²¹ C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. 6; B. Chandramohan, *A Study in Trans-Ethnicity*, pp. 81, 128.
- ²²² T. Couzens, 'Our Crippling Codes: Literature by Black South Africans', quoted by B. Chandramohan, *A Study in Trans-Ethnicity in Modern South Africa*, p. 129; J.M. Coetzee, 'Man's Fate in the Novels of Alex la Guma', pp. 358-359; B. Chandramohan pp. 81, 128.
- ²²³ A. la Guma, *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* (Heinemann, London, 1979), p. 83.
- ²²⁴ E. Mphahlele, 'Writers and Commitment', in U. Beier (ed.), *Introduction to African Literature: An anthology of critical writing* (Longman, London, 1979), p. xiv.
- ²²⁵ L. Nkosi, 'Fiction by Black South Africans', p. 227.
- ²²⁶ K. Marx and F. Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in *Selected Works* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1977), p. 39; M. Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (Verso, London, 1990), pp. 122-124.
- ²²⁷ A. la Guma, 'Why I Joined the Communist Party', p. 59.
- ²²⁸ G. Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe?', in *Writer and Critic* (Merlin Press, London, 1978), pp. 116, 119.
- ²²⁹ F. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Routledge, London, 1983), pp. 160, 212.
- ²³⁰ A. la Guma, 'Blankets', in *Black Orpheus*, 15 (1964), pp. 57-58 (repr. in *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 121-124); A. la Guma, 'Blankets', in E. Mphahlele (ed.), *African Writing Today* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1967), pp. 268-273.
- ²³¹ A. la Guma, 'Blankets', in *A Walk in the Night*, p. 124.
- ²³² C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. 87.
- ²³³ L. Nkosi, 'The new African novel: a search for modernism', in *Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature* (Longman, London, 1981), p. 55.
- ²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 74; M. Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, p. 125.
- ²³⁵ S. Gikandi, 'Race and the modernist aesthetic', in T. Youngs (ed.), *Writing and Race* (Longman, London, 1997), p. 151.
- ²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 162.
- ²³⁷ D. Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing* (Edward Arnold, London, 1977), p. 45.
- ²³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.
- ²³⁹ E. Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (Scribner's Sons, New York, 1940), p. 30; A. la Guma, *A Soviet Journey*, p. 137.
- ²⁴⁰ E. Hemingway, 'To-day is Friday', in *Men Without Women* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1955), pp. 148-150; A. la Guma, 'The Spear', undated manuscript, in the Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection.
- ²⁴¹ E. Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, p. 163.

- ²⁴² A. la Guma, 'The Lemon Orchard', in *A Walk in the Night*, p. 131-36.
- ²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 135.
- ²⁴⁴ N. Devost, 'Hemingway's girls: Unnaming and renaming Hemingway's female characters' *Hemingway Review*, 14, 1, 1994; D. Summerhayes, 'You can say that again: Some encounters with repetition in *In Our Time*', *Hemingway Review*, 10, 2 1991; D. Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing*, p. 159; see also Rabkin's comment that one reason for the success of La Guma's short stories lies in the 'severe curtailment' of his dialogue (D. Rabkin, 'Drum Magazine 1951-1961', p. 210).
- ²⁴⁵ N. Devost, 'Hemingway's girls', p. 1.
- ²⁴⁶ A. la Guma, 'Coffee for the Road', in E.A. Komey and E. Mphahlele (ed.) *Modern African Stories* (Faber and Faber, London, 1964) p. 89.
- ²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 90, 89, 91.
- ²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 93.
- ²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 90.
- ²⁵⁰ N. Ndebele, 'The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 12, 2, 1986, pp. 156, 147, 146 (emphasis in original).
- ²⁵¹ Ndebele, 'The Rediscovery of the Ordinary', p. 148.
- ²⁵² M. Trump, 'Socialist Explorations in South African Fiction', *Staffrider*, 7, 1, 1988, p. 29.
- ²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 147.
- ²⁵⁴ In *A Walk in the Night* La Guma's description of Hanover Street shop windows ends with a description of 'Christ with a crown of thorns and drops of blood like lipstick marks on his pink forehead' (8); the two policemen who stop and search Adonis are 'like destroyers at sea' (11); Uncle Doughty is 'broken and helpless as wreckage disintegrating on a hostile beach' (25); Chips' eyes 'were small and round and flat and gritty as weathered sandstone' (45); in *And a Threefold Cord* Pa's 'old chest wheezed and whispered like a tea kettle' (13); the fences around the pondokkies are 'as dangerous as sharks' teeth' (21); George Mostert had a 'bedraggled ginger moustache like a cheap cigar coming apart' and he 'potted around the service station like a stray dog sniffing at a familiar scent' (37); Susie Meyer's house is 'like the scene of a bombing' (59) [emphasis added].
- ²⁵⁵ La Guma, 'Coffee for the Road', p. 92.
- ²⁵⁶ E. Hemingway, 'Hills Like White Elephants', in E. Hemingway, *Men Without Women*, pp. 51-57.
- ²⁵⁷ B. Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition: The Structure of the Artistic Text and Typology of a Compositional Form* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1973), p. 88.
- ²⁵⁸ D. Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing*, p. 155; E.D. Vaughn, 'In Our Time and Picasso', in K. Rosen (ed.), *Hemingway Repossessed*, p. 3; S.F. Beegl, "'The Undeclared' and *Sangre y Arena*: Hemingway's *Mano a Mano* with Blasco Ibáñez', in K. Rosen (ed.), *Hemingway Repossessed*, p. 82.

Chapter Seven

Well, I'll just start again, won't I?

Politically and intellectually, La Guma was an active person, particularly in the late 1950s. However, house arrest, detentions without trial, raids and harassment all affected him badly during his last six years in South Africa. This was a period in which the National Party government introduced a number of extremely repressive laws. By 1962 it had introduced legislation that enabled it to put people under partial (12 hours per day) or total (24 hours) house arrest, and to arrest and detain suspects in solitary confinement for 12 days without charging them. This legislation had already been used against La Guma. In 1963 and 1965 legislation extended the period of detention without trial to 90 and then to 180 days respectively, and in 1966 indefinite detention became possible subject to judicial authorisation.¹ Also in 1966, the Criminal Procedure Amendment Act enabled the attorney-general to hold witnesses in prison for a period of 180 days. Much of this legislation was used against Alex and Blanche la Guma.

The liberation movement also suffered a number of serious setbacks. In December 1961 Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) began its sabotage campaign, but in August the following year Mandela was captured. In July 1963 the MK leadership was captured at Rivonia, charged with sabotage and given life sentences. The African Resistance Movement, an organisation made up primarily of former members of the Liberal Party and some Trotskyists, had some early success but it too was soon destroyed. While these two organisations concentrated on sabotage, Poqo, an insurrectionary movement associated with the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), had an explicit policy of killing people. Lodge describes it as 'probably the largest active clandestine organisation of the 1960s'. Its plans for countrywide resistance in late 1962 were intercepted and some 3 000 members were arrested.² The state also infiltrated SACP underground structures. This led to the arrest and prosecution of Party members such as Bram Fischer and Fred Carneson. Carneson was arrested in late 1965 and tried the following year. His trial would have significant implications for La Guma's future political work.

After Sharpeville foreign investment virtually ceased, but it returned during the period under consideration. The economy boomed, white living conditions rose and the National Party's popularity among whites increased. The majority of South Africans continued to live in conditions of repression and poverty.³ Despite this context, *The Stone Country*, the last novel La Guma completed in South Africa, is not unrelentingly pessimistic.

During 1965 and 1966 there was conflict among exiled members of the Coloured Peoples Congress. In 1966 La Guma's former CPC comrades Barney Desai and George Peake joined the PAC. Splits and divisions among CPC members in exile during the previous year, which led to the arrest of activists in South Africa, preceded their move to the PAC.⁴ In February 1964 Blanche had been served with a banning order which restricted her to the Wynberg magisterial district, prevented her from attending any gathering for five years and from helping to compile any publication. She also had to report to the Athlone police station every Monday.⁵ As the family's main breadwinner she found these restrictions an even greater burden. Her banning meant that she and her husband had to obtain permission to live together, because banned people could not associate with other banned people. Three months later, in a sequel to the raid of 1963, La Guma was found guilty under the Suppression of Communism Act of possessing banned material. He was sentenced to 30 days' imprisonment. Between 5 and 11 May he was held as an awaiting-trial prisoner – an experience that would provide material for *The Stone Country*.⁶ Two months later the security police raided his home again, and in September 1964 he was again charged with possessing banned material.⁷ Blanche received similar attention. In her dressing table the police found copies of articles on nursing that *New Age* had published. The articles had appeared five years before the newspaper was banned, yet she was prosecuted for possessing banned material.⁸ Unlike her husband, she was not found guilty.⁹ This was an extremely difficult period for La Guma and other members of the liberation movement. According to Albie Sachs,

...the political movement was very, very hard hit and...the idea of just hanging in there became an important political act in itself, not to give way,

even if one couldn't see oneself as a pioneer of the liberation struggle, but rather [as] the defenders, creating some kind of space to enable preparations to be made for a later assault on apartheid, and there was a very strong sense of dignity, of not giving way to the oppression, a kind of movement pride, and Alex was very strong in that...¹⁰

La Guma's outward show of strength came at a cost, and this chapter will explore its effect on him and his family. He attempted to remain strong against the harassment that he and his family experienced, the confiscation of pieces from early drafts of *The Stone Country* by the security police, and the torture which house arrest and solitary confinement inflicted on him. To the extent that anyone under house arrest has a public life, he maintained an image of strength, but in private, in his writing and in his painting he was far more vulnerable. He had what his wife later described as a 'breakdown'.

Ironically, the children, Eugene and Barto, were pleased that their father had been placed under house arrest. At last, they thought, they would have a chance to see him. Security police actions against the La Guma family took legal and non-legal forms. Among the legal forms were raids, drawn-out court cases based on minor infringements of restrictions, and detention without trial. Non-legal forms included violence against the children, harassment and intimidation of parents and children. Together they comprised a form of torture, which the United Nations has defined as

(1) ...any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted by or at the instigation of a public official on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or from a third person information or confession, punishing him for an act he has committed, or intimidating him or other persons...

(2) Torture constitutes an aggravated and deliberate form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.¹¹

In common with other detainees, the effects of this torture continued after the incidents.

In 1967 the novel was published by Seven Seas. If we apply the timeframes of *And a Threefold Cord* and Rive's *African Songs*, then La Guma must have finished it by 1966. According to Abrahams, *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* was 'conceived and substantially written' in South Africa, but finished in exile. Blanche la Guma, who typed out the manuscript in Britain, is less sure. She feels that her husband may have written the whole work in exile.¹² Given these uncertainties, I have excluded it from my enquiry. In Chapter Six I argued that *And a Threefold Cord* draws on *The Grapes of Wrath*, La Guma's own journalism and his wife's midwifery experiences. *The Stone Country* does not rely as much on a single fictional work, though it too combines a variety of sources.

The country behind the coastline

The first section of this chapter will explore some of the novel's themes and the links between his journalism and fiction. It will also show how Sir Walter Scott's *The Talisman* – with its assumptions about race, hierarchy, chivalry, degeneration, disease and the orient – contributed to his portrayal of Yusef the Turk. My argument will be that theories of degeneration and evolution formed and influenced debates about race and history among the oppressors and those, like La Guma, who sought to overthrow them.

This novel consists of two major parts, each of which contains several sections. Like La Guma's previous novels, almost all of it occurs in one setting. Unlike District Six or Windermere, Roeland Street jail did not face destruction but consolidation and extension. Part I opens close to the point at which the novel ends. George Adams, the main character, and the Casbah Kid share a cell in the Isolation Block. While Adams believes that it is important to try to change the world, the Casbah Kid, who will soon receive the death sentence for murder, is taciturn and fatalistic. The second section moves back in time to the transportation of remand prisoners from the courts. This is Adams' first experience of prison life. Jefferson Mpolo, the African comrade with whom he was arrested, explains to him that the rules of segregation outside apply

inside too: "Everybody separate, boy: White, African, Coloured. Regulations for everybody, and a white boss with a gun and a stick."¹³ While the warders mock Adams, the non-political prisoners curse the government.¹⁴ In the third section the narrator briefly presents the three convicts whose escape will occupy much of the second part and establishes a link between them and their accomplice Solly. The next two sections explore prison life in more detail. They introduce important characters such as Butcherboy Williams and Yusef the Turk, distinguish Butcherboy's brutal rule from the co-operative approach proposed by Adams and grudgingly acknowledged by the Turk, establish the bond between the Turk and Adams and the Kid's desire for revenge against Butcherboy.

A description of the circumstances that led to the arrests of the Turk and Adams indirectly supports the Turk's belief that he and Adams are both 'from the upper echelons of crime'. The narrative then shifts to its earliest historical point. Here Adams and Mpolo drive through the suburbs of Cape Town picking up and distributing leaflets until they are trapped and arrested at a rendezvous point.¹⁵ We then return to the prison and Adams' second day in the Awaiting Trial section. Adams refuses to adopt a servile approach to the guard and demands his regulation blankets. This angers the guard and Butcherboy, both whom see Adams as a threat to their control of the prison and the prisoners. After Adams has collected the provisions sent to him, Butcherboy tries to take them but the Turk intervenes on his behalf. On the third day Adams again challenges the guards by demanding his regulation tin mug. Adams receives tacit support from other prisoners. This further undermines Butcherboy's position, and he arranges with the Turk to "settle this business".¹⁶ In the final section of Part I we see that Butcherboy's position has already been sufficiently undermined to preclude a prison 'trial'. The inmates demand a 'fair fight' which pits the brute strength of Butcherboy against the scientific technique of the Turk. As Butcherboy attempts to evade the Turk, the Casbah Kid stabs and kills him with the sharpened key of a sardine tin that he found after their first encounter. Like Myra in 'Slipper Satin', Adonis in *A Walk in the Night* and Ronny in *And a Threefold Cord*, the Casbah Kid has nursed his anger.

Part II follows the same pattern of temporal shifts. It too begins in the narrated present of the Isolation Block cell occupied by Adams and the Casbah Kid, and moves backwards and forwards in time until the final sections which are in the narrated present. Adams has been placed in the Isolation Block for insubordination, and The Kid is there for attacking another prisoner. While their conversation stresses their different perspectives on the value of Cupertino among prisoners, it is the Kid who has the means and the skill to pass on tobacco to Gus, Morgan and Koppe – the occupants of the neighbouring cell – and who once again exposes Adams' unfamiliarity with prison life. This unfamiliarity enables the narrator and Adams to describe and observe prison activities and conventions. Adams uses some of these instances and his plentiful supply of cigarettes to stress the value of prisoner solidarity. Consequently, these passages convey a sense of reality and function as vehicles for the principle that the oppressed should not fight amongst themselves. The second and fourth sections return us to the morning after the fight and reinforce the differences between Adams and the other prisoners. The latter display no emotion at the death of Butcherboy. This section also explains why The Kid and Adams were placed in Isolation. We then move forward in time to the Isolation Block cell occupied by Gus, Morgan and Koppe. The omniscient narrator describes them rolling a cigarette and explains why Gus attacked a warder – it is part of an escape plan – and why he has not yet told his cellmates. The rest of the section exemplifies one of La Guma's favourite devices: the story within a story. Here Morgan tells the tale of Toffy Williams and his duplicitous wife Bella. Later Morgan retells the story of Daniel in the lions' den. .

Though placed in the isolation block, Adams receives a visit from his landlady. Solly, who throughout the novel has combined clownish behaviour with servility and an anomalous superiority, receives a visit from Flora. La Guma describes her in terms reminiscent of Missus Nzuba from his previous novel. Her food parcel contains hacksaw blades that Solly passes on to Gus. Blending allegory with realism, the tenth section combines a description of a mouse's escape from the prison cat with the handover of the hacksaw blades. In the eleventh section Adams expands on this combination of allegory and realism. This confirms La Guma's interest in and enjoyment of popular culture when he decides that watching 'the cat and that

mouse...had been as going to the pictures, in a place like this'.¹⁷ By Sunday, the day before The Kid will receive his sentence and the day on which Gus plans to escape, the 'hard breeze' was 'promising to turn into a full-scale southeaster'.¹⁸ Then follows a dry interlude that describes the Sunday morning service. The bible reading recounts how '*the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus and carried him away and delivered him to Pilate*'; the convicts sing their favourite hymn '*When the roll is called up yonder*', which, Gus Morgan and Koppe also sing as they saw through the bars of their cell.¹⁹

The remaining eight sections alternate between the escape and the growing bond between Adams and The Kid. Adams feels compelled to penetrate his 'armour of silence' and to introduce him to more altruistic perspectives, 'even if it is too bloody late'.²⁰ The Kid talks about his childhood. He tells Adams about the murder he committed and confesses his role in his father's death. In political terms La Guma can only offer limited comfort for the future.

"You's funny people, mister." The child-face with the ancient, bitter eyes, frowned. "Hear me, mister. All this stuff about our people getting into the government, too. You reckon it will help people like us? People in prison, like?"

George Adams said to this strange boy who was also a murderer: "There will certainly be more sympathy, I reckon."

"You reckon that time will come?"

George Adams said, feeling sad: "You'll see."²¹

Morgan and Koppe, who share the cell with Gus, react very differently to the news of his escape plan. Morgan takes a practical approach while Koppe reacts with fear but realises that he has no option. Like Adams, if he had spoken to the guards about Butcherboy's death, Koppe's refusal to join the other two would have resulted in retaliation from other prisoners or punishment from the prison authorities. Under cover of hearty singing – "'Those Johns really got the religion," George Adams remarked' – and the rising wind, they saw through the bars.²² Next door the Casbah Kid tells

Adams his story, which pours out like a 'mighty flood', but Adams is unprepared for 'his bitter and awful presence'.²³ As in *A Walk in the Night*, La Guma draws on wind and water as symbols of change, though in this case he also uses them to communicate a sense of irony.

Once the escapees are out of their cell and on the roof, the guards spot them and raise the alarm. The other prisoners respond by 'jeering the warders, singing, and cheering on the escapees'. Adams identifies their response as the phenomenon he desires and rejects: the 'solidarity of the underworld'.²⁴ Gus had been a cat burglar, but his nerve fails. He almost escapes but the wind blows him off the outer wall and he falls back inside the prison walls. With 'the wind clawing at him', Morgan surrenders when the warders shoot at him.²⁵ Ironically, only Koppe escapes. The two forms of release – the prisoners' escape and the Kid's confession – occur simultaneously. Neither is satisfactory and neither leads to an expected conclusion. In *A Walk in the Night* the wind signals the search for an alternative. In *And a Threefold Cord* it is a malignant force that threatens to destroy the Pauls' shack and all that it represents. In this novel, the wind does both. On the night before the escape the narrator writes that it would 'grow stronger and howl in rage at the immovable obstruction of the stone, tear at gates and bars, pound the concrete and brownstone, thrust futilely at walls and then growl on its way over the city'.²⁶ As we saw earlier, the wind impedes resistance to oppression when it blows Gus back into the prison. After the escape, the Kid receives his sentence and is placed in a special cell before his journey to Pretoria where he will be hanged. Gus and Morgan are also placed in a special cell – the Hole – as punishment. The novel ends with a brief affirmation of the bond which Adams has established with the Kid, Adams' imminent return to the Remand Section and 'the chuckling sound of the wind'.²⁷

La Guma dedicated *The Stone Country* 'to the daily average of 70,351 prisoners in South African goals in 1964'. The novel also carries an epigraph from Eugene Debs. Famous for his campaign oratory and his insistence on democratic practices, Debs founded the Social Democratic Party in the USA. In 1918, he received a ten-year sentence under the Espionage Act for challenging the prosecution of people charged with sedition. In 1894 he had organised a strike and served a six-month sentence. He

was imprisoned in Woodstock jail. Woodstock is also a suburb next to District Six and therefore close to Roeland Street jail – the setting for La Guma's prison novel.²⁸

According to one study, 'Debs entered jail as a labor agitator and emerged therefrom a Social Revolutionist'.²⁹ We do not know what La Guma knew about Debs, since the novel's epigraph circulated independently of Debs' works and appeared in local newspapers.³⁰ However its message is clear. It suggests that Debs' political development provided La Guma with a model for the political growth of his chief protagonists, that La Guma identifies with all members of the 'lower class', all those branded 'criminals' and all those in jail.³¹ Not all the critics surveyed agree that the novel conveys this message. Some find that La Guma condemns and distances himself from the 'lower class'. I will explore these interpretations.

There may well have been times when La Guma wished he was in prison. It would have released him from his other prison – the house – but only if he had pleaded or been found guilty of charges emanating from a system that he opposed.³² Any victory in the public arena of the courts therefore returned him to the private prison of his home. Under these circumstances, we can imagine that he would have had mixed feelings about being arrested and placed on remand. It would have been a shock after the isolation and relative quiet of house arrest, but it would also have been a welcome return to some form of social interaction. The end of the novel parallels this scenario, for the narrator informs us that Adams will soon be returned to the communal cells.

In prison Adams realises that he has limited agency. There are regulations, but their implementation depends on the whim of warders and collaboration between the warders and Butcherboy.³³ Adams has limited agency because the prison is an example of how the National Party government wishes to run the country through a policy of divide and rule. Thus prison inmates resolve their problems, and establish dominance and alliances, just they do in the slums from which they had come and with which Adams, who had grown up in one, is familiar:

In this half-world...there was an atmosphere of every-man-for-himself which George Adams did not like. He had grown up in the slums and knew that here...the strong preyed on the weak, and the strong and brutal acknowledged

a sort of nebulous alliance among themselves for the terrorisation of the underlings.³⁴

That combination of familiarity and disgust – the circumstances under which La Guma wrote *A Walk in the Night* and which characterised descriptions of Windermere on which he drew for *And a Threefold Cord* – are also present here. The prison is also an environment characterised by heightened repression and an absence of rules at the same time. Later I will argue that this apparent contradiction – which Marx and Engels noted was a characteristic of capitalism – is present as a real contradiction between *The Stone Country*'s symmetrical structure and the ebb and flow of stories within it.

The prison, is also part of yet separate from the everyday, familiar and 'normal' world of apartheid:

George Adams did not like it... This was the country behind the coastline of laws and regulations and labyrinthine legislation; a jungle of stone and iron, inhabited by jackals and hyenas, snarling wolves and trembling sheep, entrapped lions fighting off shambling monsters with stunted brains and bodies armoured with the hide of ignorance and brutality, trampling underfoot those who tried to claw their way from the clutch of the swamp.³⁵

Simultaneously, the 'stone country' is so strange that he feels 'like an immigrant entering a new and strange country'. Alarm and fear accompanies his arrival in prison, which he represses by 'shutting the door of his mind', 'condemning... and locking... away' these emotions.³⁶ He knows that prison is governed by the law with which he grew up and has consciously moved away from – the 'law of the jungle' – and he knows that he is poorly equipped and unprepared for the terrain.

With its stress on stones and the law of the jungle, La Guma's earlier journalism on Roeland Street jail had given the prison a personal symbolic form and had helped to establish its notoriety.³⁷ In the novel the prison also represents something more dangerous than the political system it tries to replicate, and this is evident from the start. As Adams arrives at the jail, La Guma describes it as 'a squat, wide girdle of

brownstone and grey-painted mortar and concrete enclosing a straining body of brickwork and more stone'. This suggests that the building struggles to contain that which is inside it and that its external boundaries and its appearance are more important than the relationships between the elements inside it. Then follows a contrast between its 'façade...brightened with lawns and flower-beds' and its purpose. The narrator writes that it 'waited like a diseased harlot, disguised in finery, to embrace an unsuspecting customer'.³⁸ In a text dominated by images of metal and stone, La Guma uses images of sex and hidden impurity to describe Adams' first entry. In the second part he retains a sexual theme by comparing the sawing movement of the hacksaw blade to an erect and thrusting penis: 'Each drive of the blade was like the thrust of a phallus, and each parting of a hard strand, an orgasm of metal. Gus had swung into *Stand up, stand up for Jesus* and his arm worked to rhythm of the marching hymn.'³⁹

This contrast between a cosmetically enhanced exterior and a diseased interior establishes the distinction between the sunny South African of the tourist brochures and the reality of poverty and oppression which La Guma later argued was part of the motivation for writing *And a Threefold Cord*. However the 'diseased harlot' image goes further, because it suggests that people who enter into or penetrate the jail will become infected, and that the source of the infection is hidden whereas on the outside – in the slums with 'exposed brickwork...like scabless sores' – it is not.⁴⁰ Thus, alongside its similarities with and differences from the outside world is something insidious and invisible.

Many of those arrested for political offences – whether on Robben Island or at Roeland Street – were held among 'common' criminals who in effect controlled the prisons. This was part of a deliberate policy to break down the political prisoners. Under these circumstances it is understandable that political prisoners should distance themselves from and condemn the 'common' criminals. Political prisoners achieved both of those aims by condemning homosexuality and stressing the 'sub-human' or animal qualities of common criminals whom they regarded as sexually deviant.⁴¹

There was nothing unusual at that time in La Guma's condemnation, which we saw in his earlier journalism and short stories. Over the eight or nine years between 'Law of the Jungle' in October 1956 and the start of *The Stone Country* in 1964 or

1965, the representation of a brutal and physically powerful cell boss figure went through a series of modifications in which some details were suppressed and replaced with others. In 'Law of the Jungle' La Guma had described a 'husky lifer' who 'prowled like a savage gorilla in captivity, giving vent to all the primeval brutalities forced upon him by frustration.... Discovered with a young convict one night, he was... flogged. But it is not through strokes with a cane that these men will be cured of the animalism which overcomes them.'⁴² These reports from the late 1950s show that La Guma regarded homosexuality as a perversion, a symptom of degeneration and a consequence of prison life. It was simultaneously 'real' and 'symbolic'. In this respect it supports Chandramohan's argument about the transition in his literary style from near-naturalism to allegory and symbolism'.⁴³ In La Guma's view, homosexuality was not natural. Just as lower forms of culture like the coons would die out as the general level of economic and political existence improved, so homosexuality could be cured if a prisoner's circumstances changed.⁴⁴ 'Out of Darkness' indicates the way in which these changes might occur: "'Do you know that the whole of mankind's history consists of a series of revolutions?'"', Ou Kakkalak asked the narrator, his fellow prisoner.⁴⁵

From this point on, as we have seen in Chapter Five, the processes of transposition and displacement partially repress the symptoms of prison sex until the fight that ends with Butcherboy's death. Literally and symbolically, the fight kills off transgressive desire and collaboration between prisoners and guards, both of which are epitomised by Butcherboy's 'deadly embrace'.⁴⁶ The latter's death is also a turning point for Adams, who must now live by the same rules as the other prisoners. The Turk 'angrily' reminds Adams after the fight that "'inside here people settle their business and don't have nothing, or little, to do with the white man as possible. Now don't you go thinking this like it is outside.... Another thing, if you start to be a good boy and try to help the law, Butcherboy's pals isn't going to like it.... They's going to lay in the tracks of anybody what talks.'"'⁴⁷ Adams will be on his own if he talks. Ironically, in view of Adams' quest for co-operation and mutual support among prisoners, he learns that solidarity among the prisoners can also perpetuate the law of the jungle.

The narrator depicts the Turk with ambivalence. This ambivalence characterises his attitude towards several prisoners. The Turk knows about 'the Resistance' because he has read about it. When the Turk tells Adams this and expresses admiration for its "big business", the latter suspects a trap of some sort and responds 'carefully'. Initially he distances himself from the Turk. We also learn that the Turk regards Adams as his equal, 'an expert from the upper echelons of crime', and that he looks down on the other prisoners.⁴⁸ Despite his desire to distance himself from the Turk, Adams stresses the joint predicament of all prisoners and the importance of sharing and Cupertino. By virtue of this stress, however, he also becomes part of and is identified with a set of values that differs from and challenges Butcherboy's dominance and the values he represents. Later the Turk acknowledges that Adams is his superior and that he should protect him from Butcherboy. "This is *good* people, man. Not your kind, not my kind, even", he tells Butcherboy when the latter is about to take Adams' parcel.⁴⁹ In turn Butcherboy sees the Turk, not Adams, as his main threat.

At least part of the reason for La Guma's ambivalence lies in the influence on him of the writers that he read. We can see traces of another writer in the occasional use of terms more commonly found in North American English. Like *And a Threefold Cord's* use of 'fetid' rather than 'foetid', *The Stone Country* uses the American English 'faucet' once, and the British English 'tap' several times. In *And a Threefold Cord* and *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, he regularly uses the American English 'windshield' instead of 'windscreen' and 'flashlight' instead of 'torch'. When La Guma wrote that the fat guard's voice 'had the expressionless sound of a dripping faucet' he probably drew on an American text.⁵⁰ The writers whom he read also enabled him to articulate the tension between the fear of degeneration and the desire for downward identification that we found in his previous novel in other ways. Unlike Butcherboy, Yusef the Turk has no apparent journalistic predecessor in La Guma's writing. The short story 'Out of the Darkness' contains a character known as Ou Kakkalak [Old Cockroach] who was 'tall and thin and bony, folded up now like a carpenter's ruler'.⁵¹ In 'Tattoo Marks and Nails' there are no descriptions of the Turk's body, but there are references to his teeth.⁵² After that the character receives no further elaboration until *The Stone Country*. I believe that La Guma could introduce Yusef the Turk at this late stage on a

par with Butcherboy by 'importing' him in modified form from *The Talisman* by Sir Walter Scott.

Set in the 'Holy Land' during the Crusades, *The Talisman*, in its opening pages, describe an Emir on whom Yusef the Turk appears to be modelled. According to Scott, the 'person and proportions of the Saracen...might have been compared with his sheeny and crescent-formed sabre, with its narrow and light, but bright and keen Damascus blade'.⁵³ In *The Stone Country*, La Guma first describes Yusef the Turk as 'lounging angularly...like a discarded folding ruler'. Later in the same text he had a 'tall, lean, knife-blade form'.⁵⁴ Before his fight with Butcherboy Williams, his 'long body was really as tough and as flexible as a sjambok'.⁵⁵ In *The Talisman*, the Emir's features were 'deeply embrowned by the Eastern sun', and his teeth 'equalled in beauty the ivory of his deserts'.⁵⁶ In *The Stone Country* Yusef the Turk had 'a lean, smooth, handsome face, tan-coloured' with 'even dentures, white as new enamel in the swarthy face'.⁵⁷ There are also some similarities in the plot. In *The Talisman*, the Emir and Sir Kenneth, the knightly hero, share a common code of chivalry despite their religious differences.

Secondly, Richard the Lionheart describes Saladin (one of whose many disguises was the Emir) as 'so full of all the virtues which may distinguish unchristened man'.⁵⁸ It is Saladin who protects Richard against the plots of his apparent allies, while in *The Stone Country* the Turk protects Adams against Butcherboy. In addition, the 'fair fight' between Butcherboy and the Turk, evokes chivalric codes and repeats the terms of the fight between Roman and Charlie Pauls in *And a Threefold Cord*.⁵⁹ In that novel, Charlie protects his younger brother by fighting Roman. Balutansky is aware of this point, but she identifies with La Guma's ambivalence. In her eyes Yusef the Turk is socially morally aware but remains subhuman: the Turk is 'a noble animal, he attacks only when provoked or when his chivalry leads him to defend a protégé'.⁶⁰ Thirdly, there are similarities between the deaths of Butcherboy and those of two villains in *The Talisman* and *Quentin Durward* – another Scott novel that La Guma read.⁶¹ In both cases the villain is stronger yet clumsier than his more virtuous opponent, whose agility and intellect give him the critical edge. Nor does the hero actually kill his opponent; the task falls to someone else.⁶²

In this novel La Guma's debt to Scott is not as extensive as his debt to Steinbeck in *And a Threefold Cord*, but he had read some of Scott's novels well before he wrote *The Stone Country* and he referred to them well after he had finished it. The autobiographical writings of Mphahlele and Rive indicate that Scott was a popular novelist in the 1920s and 1930s – at least for boys – and La Guma has not hidden the fact that he read and enjoyed Scott's novels.⁶³ One of his setwork books for the Junior Certificate exam, which he wrote in 1940, was *Quentin Durward*, in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* a schoolteacher sympathetic to the liberation movement has works by Scott on his bookshelf, and in the trip that later became *A Soviet Journey* he associates a Lithuanian castle with 'a children's fairy-tale or a Walter Scott novel...Quentin Durward and Ivanhoe', as he 'crossed the long wooden causeway' and saw the drawbridge.⁶⁴ Just as we saw in his utterances on Steinbeck's influence, La Guma was less open about the Scott novel with which his work has greater correspondence than the works that do not. While La Guma has acknowledged the impact of *Quentin Durward* and 'the things that little children read', the same does not apply to the effect of *The Talisman* on his work.⁶⁵ Taking up the idea of controlled access to and departure from a split-off and imperfectly contained past which the image of drawbridge and castle in Scott's romantic reconstructions provides, La Guma has enabled us to see indirectly that he drew on Scott for aspects of plot, characterisation and physical descriptions.

There is no doubt that La Guma could have devised a character like the Turk, who functions as a foil to Butcherboy. In comparison with the preceding novel, the slightness of his debt here suggests that La Guma did not draw on Scott consciously. My argument here is that we can add another layer of interpretation to the widespread assumption that in *The Stone Country* La Guma establishes a direct correspondence between South African prison conditions, 'political' and 'common' prisoners and the South Africa of the 1960s. We need to acknowledge that La Guma's own past coexisted with his present, and that his present was not solely governed by a forward-looking political and literary project. In his own words taken from *A Soviet Journey*, we need to acknowledge that 'ghosts of the colourful past' existed alongside his journalism, personal experience and allegory in his most developed work on 'Cape

Town's notorious "Big House".⁶⁶ This sense of a past co-existing with the present has significant implications for the study of La Guma's work. It confirms a point I will explore later – that in *The Stone Country* we can detect a desire for 'the memory of a sovereign subject at work'. In advancing this point, I will also want to refine the widely held view – best expressed by Balutansky and exemplified by the Debs epigraph– that La Guma was 'a conscious writer and activist whose ideology has led him to choose an aesthetic that focuses on the collective experience of oppression and struggle rather than individual experience'.⁶⁷ In effect, I will argue that La Guma consciously chose to focus on 'collective experience' but that the conditions under which he wrote *The Stone Country* led him to produce a work whose form and content were symptoms of 'individual experience' that he could not articulate.

We might associate the representations of Butcherboy and the Turk and the prison hierarchies with the thoughts of nineteenth-century anthropologists such as Tylor. There is no indication that La Guma read their work but, as I will show, the ideas they contained clearly informed his thinking on social hierarchy and progress. Tylor argued that the 'history of civilization teaches us that, up to a certain point, savages and barbarians are like what our ancestors were and our peasants still are'.⁶⁸ While Tylor focuses on what might tentatively be described as arrested development, Foucault's analysis of attitudes to sexuality and sexual practices indicates that ideas about backward development or downward adaptation existed at that time. Both of these assumptions are present in La Guma's work – particularly in this novel. Foucault's analysis of the nineteenth-century conception of 'degenerescence' is also applicable here. Degenerescence was used to explain 'how a heredity that was burdened with various maladies...ended by producing a sexual pervert'.⁶⁹ The terms of this debate were already part of that jail's image and reputation: 'Nothing but man's basest animal instincts are developed here' was how a former remand prisoner – like La Guma and Adams – described his time in Roeland Street jail in a 1938 letter to *The Sun* newspaper. It was a 'degenerating experience', he wrote.⁷⁰ Later La Guma's own work contributed to the prison's reputation.

Much of this appears to reinforce assertions by Carpenter in his study of *The Stone Country* that La Guma's work 'provides a sometimes questionable foundation for

future society'.⁷¹ After all, La Guma's main character may preach social equality and co-operation but the novel's narrator is, in Carpenter's words, 'horrified' by Butcherboy.⁷² However, there are at least two major problems with Carpenter's analysis. Firstly, he establishes a false division between an early La Guma who focuses on the body, and a later La Guma who focuses on the social group. Secondly, despite his view that Butcherboy is 'the product of materialistic determination', the fact that the work of Morgan, Tylor and other nineteenth-century anthropologists could support both 'degenerescence' and Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* suggests that Carpenter has underestimated the significance for La Guma of historical materialism.⁷³ This other, equally persuasive nineteenth-century anthropology asserted a more optimistic relationship between economic, political and cultural development.⁷⁴ It influenced ideas about the relationship between literature, history and development in the Soviet Union during the late 1930s, when Lukács wrote that 'what in Morgan, Marx and Engels was worked out and proved with theoretical and historical clarity, lives, moves and has its being poetically in the best historical novels of Scott'.⁷⁵ Thus alongside a childhood reading of Scott, in all probability informed by the imperialist concerns that characterised an education based on British textbooks and compatible with Carpenter's analysis, were the conditions for another more optimistic interpretation. There is plenty of evidence among La Guma's writing – from his 1947 letter on communism, his thoughts on the Coons, and his unpublished critique of George Peake – to support the notion of an upward progressive course of individual and social development

La Guma's belief in progress was part of a debate that ranged materialist evolutionary theory against the attribution of innate qualities. This debate informed public discussion about coloured identity on at least two significant popular issues: 'skollies' and the 'coons'. In 1945 the debate posed notions such as perceptions about 'the "moral weakness" of the Coloured man' – a conflation of social and physical characteristics – against the view that 'dead-end kids, or skollies or gangsters' – such as Willieboy, Ronny or the Casbah Kid – were an 'inevitable by-product of the capitalist system' and 'the exploitation and oppression of the non-European'.⁷⁶ Twelve years later La Guma implicitly recognised that coloureds who saw the Coons as

'degrading' and called for their abolition because they revealed 'a very low standard of culture' – because, as Jeppie argues, they were seen as 'an expression of primeval coloured ethnicity' – were applying Tylor's argument to a cultural context.⁷⁷ As we saw in Chapter Three, La Guma upheld a conventional evolutionary materialism, but acknowledged that political and cultural development could be relatively autonomous. At this time he saw Roeland Street jail as a site and source of injustice, oppression and perversion that caused its inmates to behave in animal-like ways. He also acknowledged that for many ex-convicts there was little difference between their living conditions and social organisation inside and outside jail. Once jail had turned them into animals they continued to live by the law of the jungle.

Despite the optimistic and forward-looking aspects of La Guma's commitment to historical materialism, there is no denying that works such as *And a Threefold Cord* and *The Stone Country* are pessimistic to the extent that they offer little prospect of any change in the environment and assume that environmental factors determine behaviour. It is also true that in *The Stone Country* Adams observes far more than he intervenes and that he makes very little difference to prison life, but his dignity – a quality which La Guma displayed – and his stress on co-operation and sharing influence the Turk and the Kid for the better.⁷⁸ Beyond this he has little influence. Following Butcherboy's death, it 'remained to be seen which single one' of his gang 'would emerge as dictator'.⁷⁹ When La Guma wrote *The Stone Country*, he reaffirmed this vision of a society that was governed by rules yet anarchic; that ground down people, set them against each other 'like dogs', and created the conditions for degeneration, 'perversion' and revolt.⁸⁰ However we should not view the work solely as pessimistic. This was a 'trying time' – a phrase he had used earlier to describe the life of shack dwellers in winter – but, as we have already seen and as I will show later La Guma's could combine pessimism with irony.

Most of Part 1 occurs in the communal cells, and therefore there is more contact between prisoners and guards than in Part 2, which is set in the Isolation Block. In the opening sections of Part 1, which establish the jail as a stone country, the guards are an extension of the prison:

Inside the yard, past the iron grille and the gate, the atmosphere had suddenly chilled, as if the afternoon had suddenly been cut off. The shadows of the stone walls on each side of the area made a greyness that was as threatening as the expressionless faces of the flat-capped warders whose frigid eyes watched for the slightest suspicion of indiscipline.⁸¹

This also applies to La Guma's repetitious descriptions of the eyes of prisoners and prison officials. Most of the descriptions of Butcherboy Williams' eyes are variations on the theme of 'apelike'.⁸² The Casbah Kid's eyes are like stone.⁸³ On entering the prison the eyes of the warder reveal 'no expression'. Other warders' eyes are 'flat as pieces of glass', 'cold and dark and bitter as midnight in winter', 'pale and washed-out and silvery, much like imitation pearls, and cold as quick silver', 'chill as new frost', 'chill and rigid as death'.⁸⁴ The eyes of the doctor who carries a stethoscope 'like a whip' are 'pouched and watery, as if they were being preserved in little cups of formaldehyde'. His eyes 'swivelled and ran along the lines of men'.⁸⁵ The warders' eyes 'scour', and are 'gravelly'.⁸⁶ By contrast Mpolo's eyes are like 'restless geckoes' and Morgan's are 'bright and brown, and full of humour'.⁸⁷

While the coloured warders remain anonymous, ridiculous and superfluous, La Guma distinguishes a number of types among the white officials. The menacing guard with 'the chest and shoulders of a young bear, and the thick bowed legs of an ape' appears only once and has much in common with Butcherboy.⁸⁸ Most of Adams' direct confrontations with prison authority occur with the fat guard who uses Butcherboy to control the section and to destroy Adams. In comparison with the short Adams, the tall, lean Turk and the powerful but degenerating Butcherboy, this guard is 'heavy and paunchy and seemed to be constructed from a series of soft, smoothly jointed sacs, and he had a plump, smooth, healthy pink face like a Santa Claus with a blond moustache instead of a snow-white beard'.⁸⁹ Before Butcherboy's death this guard is a threatening and dangerous figure. After his death 'old Fatso' becomes 'as nervous as hell'.⁹⁰ The prisoners laugh openly at his 'angry jiggling walk. He looked like a plump woman hurrying to keep an appointment.' In the eyes of the narrator and the prisoners he has lost power – the attribute which defines masculinity in La Guma's

prison setting. Though self-consciously caricatured and clichéd, La Guma's descriptions of guards and prisoners combine distaste, condemnation, horror – and occasionally a measure of affection and sympathy for even the most derelict or threatening characters.⁹¹

Music swirls through the stone country. Early in the novel he writes that 'the only music that the regulations allowed was composed out of the slap-slap of bare feet, the grinding of boots, counterpointed by shouted orders, the slam of doors and the tintinnabulation of heavy doors', yet this novel is full of songs.⁹² We can interpret La Guma's references to music in different ways. In 'Etude', classical music exposes an uneducated burglar to beauty, but this leads to his downfall. As an exploration of the effects of American popular culture on the inhabitants of District Six, jazz, blues and boogie woogie dominate *A Walk in the Night* which, like *The Stone Country* takes place close to the 'Big Days' of the Coon Carnival. In the latter, most of the songs that flow through the prison are hymns and carols. For La Guma, like other political prisoners held in solitary confinement, the chimes of a church clock, the sound of another prisoner whistling or singing significant tunes or songs, established contact with a like-minded person, created solidarity, confirmed that even the most antisocial or derelict individuals had something beautiful about them and brought harmony and beauty into the 'stone country'.⁹³ In this novel singing fulfils an additional function, for the references to hymns and the incongruous dreams of a white Christmas create an ironic and 'reluctant counterpoint' to the law of the jungle.⁹⁴

A small something of what they want to make the country

The second section of the chapter continues to explore some the issues raised by La Guma's debt to Scott. It examines the idea that in *The Stone Country* La Guma accepts the idea that criminals have recognisable physical features that distinguish them from other 'normal' people, and that these features indicate their inferiority and degeneracy. This issue cannot be ignored. This section will also look at the relationship between the novel's structure and the circumstances under which he wrote it. The novel has a symmetrical form, but beneath this the novel abounds with diverse voices, songs and stories-within-stories. This disjuncture points to the difficulties La Guma faced while

trying to write it. I will argue that this disjuncture between form and content in *The Stone Country* is symptomatic of a deeper conflict within La Guma at this time: between his intention to write a novel guided by the conventions of realism and naturalism and the conditions under which he wrote it. Sometimes this resulted in a modernist effect. 'To be modern,' writes Berman, 'is to experience personal and social life as a maelstrom, to find one's world and oneself in perpetual disintegration and renewal, trouble and anguish, ambiguity and contradiction: to be part of a universe in which all that is solid melts into air.'⁹⁵ La Guma did not consciously embrace modernism or set out to write a modernist prison novel. There is little evidence at this stage that La Guma wished to be a modernist in this sense – to make himself 'somehow at home in the maelstrom... to move with its currents in search of the forms of reality, of beauty, of freedom, of justice, that its fervid and perilous flow allows'.⁹⁶ His interest in the more realist modernism of Hemingway and the political and psychological conditions of house arrest, raids and prison under which he lived and worked at times had a modernist effect on his writing, and on the way in which he incorporated painterly images into his fiction.

La Guma's experiences of prison began no later than 1955, when he was arrested en route to Kliptown. According to Dennis Brutus, La Guma based *The Stone Country* on experiences dating from 1961 and from his association with Brutus and Peake. Peake had planted a bomb outside Roeland Street Jail.⁹⁷ During 1963, 1964 and 1966 La Guma spent a considerable amount of time in jail – in solitary confinement and on remand. There were times when, like George Adams in *The Stone Country*, he was a political prisoner among non-political offenders. In an interview with Abrahams, La Guma remarked that he 'even shared a cell with a young boy who is the Casbah Kid in the novel', and 'had a chance to observe him' and speak to him. As a result, the character on whom La Guma modelled the Casbah Kid developed a better view of life. La Guma says that this is 'exactly how it happened in reality'. There was also an escape while La Guma was in prison.⁹⁸

He also qualifies this autobiographical element: "'Most of it is completely authentic, but, of course, from my own point of view'", he told Abrahams.⁹⁹ This qualification opens up a number of approaches to the text. We can argue that

authenticity cannot be qualified: something is authentic or it is not. Alternatively we can argue that *The Stone Country* is authentic because it was 'true for La Guma' even if it contains events and characteristics that we can attribute to sources outside his own or others' prison experiences. Thirdly we can argue that authenticity itself is a fiction because no text has a single author. Every text always carries more than one message in the form of traces of other writers or voices. In the course of this chapter, I will examine the second and third responses to the question of authenticity. Chapter Six showed that reliance on another's work does not preclude authenticity or negate the autobiographical qualities of a work. La Guma drew on Steinbeck's work precisely because it enabled him to express his own ideas and emotions. Authenticity, autobiography and reliance on another's work are all compatible under certain conditions, and I will set out these below. None of these qualifications trivialise or undermines the novel's value, nor do they prevent us from passing aesthetic judgements on the text.¹⁰⁰

One of the earliest responses to the novel came from Nkosi, who praised La Guma's 'wonderful, even humorous sketches of a variety of characters'. Nkosi also criticised him for sticking to "'types'" and complained that 'he *tells* everything...but *illuminates* nothing' because there is no exploration of his characters' inner lives.¹⁰¹ Coetzee was one of the first to propose that La Guma's main characters developed from novel to novel: 'Where La Guma's earlier protagonists were still learning, Adams is teaching.'¹⁰² Adams participates in the work of a non-racial organisation that opposes apartheid. La Guma writes that Adams had 'gone to meetings and listened to the speeches, had read a little, and had come to the conclusion that what had been said was right'.¹⁰³ We should be wary of assuming that Adams is a more politically developed version of Franky Lorenzo or the taxi driver in *A Walk in the Night*, or of 'the slim burg' and Charlie Pauls from *And a Threefold Cord*. The characters from the first two novels have political potential, but there is no guarantee that their political consciousness will develop into the views and actions of a George Adams. His political consciousness is already developed and relatively advanced. He seems to represent La Guma's hope – articulated in the aftermath of the 1958 election campaign – that if the experience of oppression could not change the political views of coloureds, then 'a lot

more political work' in the form of persuasion would draw them to the liberation struggle. Despite this, initially Adams is suspicious of the Turk's enthusiastic response to one of the 'sabotage men'. More in keeping with La Guma's view that coloureds were insufficiently involved in politics, and Adams' attitude towards the coloured slum dwellers with whom he grew is the latter's surprise that one could be imprisoned for political reasons. This in turn elicits various forms of support and sympathy from the highest to the lowest echelons of the criminal world.¹⁰⁴ Subsequent critics, such as Chandramohan, JanMohamed and Mkhize, hold to this developmental view. For JanMohamed, Adams' 'control over his own destiny marks the end of the naturalistic tendency in La Guma's fiction'. Adams' 'subordination and sacrifice of personal freedom and self-concern for a larger communal interest, marks the beginning of a new phase' in La Guma's writing.¹⁰⁵ According to Chandramohan, with this novel La Guma begins to stress the importance that political organisations and movements play in changing society. Pointing to the alliance between the fat guard and Butcherboy Williams, Chandramohan suggests that here La Guma presented race relations 'in a more complex light'.¹⁰⁶ In this chapter I will contest these ideas.

JanMohamed is correct that Adams has made a conscious decision to join the liberation struggle, but the bulk is set in an environment in which he has very little control. The new phase detected by JanMohamed does not mean the novel's social or physical context is less bleak than La Guma's earlier works. The inhabitants of this harsh 'stone country' live by the 'law of the jungle' – a system that differs little from the criminal and slum world they inhabit on the outside. In addition, as several critics have pointed out, the novel presents the whole of South Africa as a prison.¹⁰⁷ For Riemenschneider '[p]rison and its inmates *in* South Africa thus become the symbols of the prison and prisoners *of* South Africa', while for Barratt the 'central metaphor' of La Guma's fiction is that 'South Africa is an area of physical and metaphysical incarceration'.¹⁰⁸ The links between physical and metaphorical descriptions in the novel's setting have encouraged critics to examine La Guma's portrayals of specific character types. Where Coetzee looks at the politically progressive elements, Carpenter traces the regressive characters. Commenting on a description of Butcherboy Williams, which he links to Roman from *And a Threefold Cord*, Carpenter notes that 'the

awkward phrase “consistent with,” used to gather the incoherent tattoo marks under the abstract rubric of “barbarism,” betrays a defensive reaction to this vision...La Guma uncharacteristically imagines this brutality as a deficiency in biological and historical development.’¹⁰⁹

In *Butcherboy* La Guma concentrates the fear of downward adaptation that we saw in *And a Threefold Cord*. Carpenter opens up a promising area of enquiry. The reference to a ‘nineteenth-century anthropology’ indicates the historical origins of La Guma’s description, and a later part of this chapter will deal with that and with the way in which La Guma uses irony to undermine this image, but this does not explain why the contradiction between political principle and characterisation in this novel has received relatively little attention. Schalkwyk sees the answer in a ‘rhetoric of dissent [that] is at the same time a rhetoric of accommodation’ or ‘justification’. By examining descriptions of faces and bodies, Schalkwyk shows that La Guma invites his readers, whom he assumes are middle-class, to condemn the political system that Adams opposes, to ‘identify with the middle-class fastidiousness of the hero’ and to accept and support La Guma’s caricatured depictions of the prison’s inmates. Confirming earlier arguments in this thesis about La Guma’s interest in and dependence on popular cultural genres, Schalkwyk regards the Turk as La Guma’s version of ‘the intriguing “gentleman gangster” of countless films’ and media constructions.¹¹⁰ As a result, *The Stone Country* criticises apartheid but supports a more pervasive and insidious set of values. These values preserve class and status distinctions by categorising characters on the grounds of criminal physiognomy.¹¹¹

In the second section of Part I. Adams is in a truck with other awaiting trial prisoners en route from the courts to the jail: ‘All around him was a composition of faces; faces burned with stubble or cicatrized with scars; bloated faces and depraved faces; vicious faces and kind faces; faces hopeless, impersonal, happy, frightened, brutal...Looking at the faces about him, George Adams thought that he could do with a bath.’¹¹² According to Schalkwyk, the narrator’s ‘sense of defilement’ is indicative of La Guma’s reliance on a ‘criminal physiognomy’, and this contradicts his political intentions.¹¹³ La Guma’s description is problematic, but when he repeats it in modified form the context and Adams’ outlook has changed in some respects. In its second

version, La Guma uses it to describe Adams' movement past prisoners after he has demanded and received his regulation mat and blankets. After Adams has successfully challenged the guard's authority, the narrator describes him 'passing other men in the yard, passing the brutal faces and the depraved faces, the young faces and the lined faces, the hopeless faces and the stubborn faces, and suddenly he felt better again and winked as he passed, and the silent men looked curiously at him, and a few grinned and winked back, too'.¹¹⁴ By concentrating on the first composition Schalkwyk has overlooked the changes that it undergoes and the ambivalence that creeps in. The elements of 'criminal physiognomy' are still there, but by challenging the prison's formal and informal power structures Adams has become one of – yet retained a distance from – the other prisoners. In the process Adams acknowledges that he is part of their world.

Schalkwyk's approach draws attention to La Guma's particular use of literary devices in this novel. Like many other critics, Balutansky shares Mpolo's view of jail as "'a small something of what they want to make the country'" – the phrase with which many justify allegorical or metaphorical readings of the novel – but feels that it is more pessimistic than his previous works.¹¹⁵ She does not base her interpretation solely on the lack of optimistic symbols or on Adams' limited impact on prison manners and customs but on two related points.¹¹⁶ Firstly, as the Mpolo quote shows, Adams *knows* that he is 'living the terms of an allegory'.¹¹⁷ Therefore his actions are symbolic for himself and for the reader. Secondly, in contrast to *A Walk in the Night* where optimistic symbols run counter to the narrative, this novel's symbols of optimism such as the fight between Butcherboy and the Turk, the mouse's escape from the cat, or Koppe's escape do not rise above or challenge 'the terms of the novel's allegorical structure'.¹¹⁸ Consequently there is no conflictual or dialectical relationship between the story of *The Stone Country* and its symbols.¹¹⁹ Nor does the repetition of certain descriptions – particularly of Butcherboy or Solly – help. Balutansky and Moore agree that *The Stone Country* displays a descriptive superfluity at odds with its constricted setting and with the economical characterisations found in his previous works.¹²⁰

The limitations to Balutansky's approach are evident in her discussion of the novel's structure and in her consideration of the political conditions under which La Guma wrote it. She feels that the story is 'disjointed' and that it is 'neither chronological nor focused exclusively on Adams' thoughts'.¹²¹ As early as 1975 Rabkin explored these areas. He sees *The Stone Country's* structure as evidence of an attempt to use earlier work – particularly 'Tattoo Marks and Nails'. Chapters Five and Six of this thesis have already shown that journalism such as 'Ten Days in Roeland Street Jail' and 'Law of the Jungle', and short stories like 'Out of Darkness' and 'Tattoo Marks and Nails' contributed substantially to this novel. Rabkin also points out that the novel contains indented passages 'in the manner of an eighteenth century novel. The result', he says, 'cannot be said to be completely integrated, a failure tacitly admitted by the author's division of the narrative into parts one and two.'¹²² Roscoe goes so far as to say that the 'book almost falls apart because La Guma exhausts one line of event'. For Roscoe the conflict involving Adams, Butcherboy and the Turk occurs 'too early and he [La Guma] must spin out the text with something else'.¹²³ That 'something else' is the escape plan and Adams' attempts to establish a personal connection with the Kid. This criticism is in keeping with Roscoe's view that La Guma's preferred medium was the short story. If we compare his third novel with *And a Threefold Cord* then we could argue that in *The Stone Country* La Guma had tried, and failed, to write a novel because he could not adapt to the latter's more expansive boundaries, subplots and deferred *dénouements*. Mphahlele's correspondence with La Guma over *A Walk in the Night*, already mentioned in Chapter Five, in which he assumed that La Guma had 'meant it to be a long short-story, and [that] the story itself couldn't become a full-fledged novel', contextualises of Roscoe's criticism.¹²⁴

However, we should also understand the circumstances under which La Guma wrote this novel. Firstly, it took him a long time to write anything. Secondly, when the police raided the La Gumas' house they could take away any material that he had written. According to Dennis Brutus, La Guma hid each completed page and kept one page in the typewriter, but sometimes the Security Police found his work.¹²⁵ Undoubtedly this increased the time he took to write the novel and disrupted his thoughts. Blanche remembers that

...the other disadvantage was that he had to hide it [the typescript], and often he didn't know where he had hidden it. Sometimes they'd [security police] come and raid and take it away, and he would start again...But where were we to hide [things]? There was really no place to hide [anything] because they would look in the fridge, in the tea tins and sugar tins and tell me, 'Ag, Blanche, ons weet van almal, die hele stuk goed is daar weg.' [Ag Blanche, we know about everyone, the whole lot has gone from here.] And it was hopeless putting anything in your ceiling....Among things I know [they searched] was the soiled washing....I can just still picture them today turning the whole place upside down and going through every pocket and through every seam....He would be working on a manuscript and the pages or the chapters would be taken away....It was very difficult and I felt awful because he put a lot into it and then he would just say 'Well I'll just start again, won't I?' He never went to pieces on that, but it must have been eating [at] him very badly.¹²⁶

This situation – in which he would write something, hide it, be raided, have it confiscated or forget where he had hidden it – must have made it extremely difficult to retain an overall sense of the work. The act of writing was not illegal, but anything that he was writing or had written might be regarded as such, and by 1965 he had experienced this form of harassment several times. In October 1963 he was charged with possessing banned material, and in September the following year he and Blanche were both charged with the same offence. Blanche was charged with possessing articles that she had written for *New Age* five years before the paper was banned.¹²⁷ What we have in the published version are beginnings, middles and ends that stand in unresolved relationships to each other since they make up different parts of a novel that La Guma began and restarted under a succession of different conditions with different pre-texts and memories at his disposal. On this basis we cannot say whether La Guma initially intended to begin the novel close to the point at which its action ends, but we can say that this beginning gives the reader a sense of process without any indication of

its cause or at what point the events to which it refers begin, and that in part the effect of arbitrariness and disruption in the work stems from the forms of repression and assertion that required him to write, remember, repeat, re-create and rework.¹²⁸ As a result of these factors, he produced a work that was modernist in its effect because it articulates the experience of 'personal and social life as a maelstrom', of finding 'one's world and oneself in perpetual disintegration and renewal, trouble and anguish, ambiguity and contradiction'.¹²⁹

His bitter and awful presence

La Guma's sources for *And a Threefold Cord* and *The Stone Country* differed, and this suggests that his idea of himself as a writer changed from text to text. In the former he borrowed from John Steinbeck, and for his third long work he borrowed far more from himself. In political terms, he repossessed the texts that the bannings of *New Age* and of his own work had removed from him. In literary terms, he challenged the idea that every creation or assertion of identity should be new or original. This had several implications. The act of repeating himself affirmed his refusal to be censored. It also implied the existence of someone who had already written in a style – such as journalism – and under conditions – such as relative freedom of movement and expression – that could not be repeated. Through this repetition he acknowledged to himself what he had lost. In political and literary terms therefore the work implies what Meltzer calls 'the memory of a sovereign subject at work'.¹³⁰ By repeating his own work La Guma was asserting the continuities he desired and the breaks that he experienced in his identity. During the period under discussion this identity was determined by twenty-four hour house arrest, periods on remand and solitary confinement punctuated by court appearances. Later parts of this chapter will deal with the strain that these pressures placed on him.

An examination of stories within the novel over which the main protagonist has no control, where the narrator shifts between narrative styles and points of view which are repeated but not fully integrated into the story as a whole, illustrates this point. George Adams is a first-time prisoner on remand. The novel begins and ends with sections set in the Isolation Block cell shared by Adams and the Casbah Kid. At the start we learn

that the Kid spoke ‘seldom and reluctantly’, but ‘lately, alone with the other man [Adams],...had opened up a little’. After his ‘last supper’ with Adams he confesses his role in his father’s death.¹³¹ Before his sentencing he shakes hands with Adams. At the hearing the judge dismisses the defence argument that familial, social and economic factors predisposed the Kid to kill. Just before he is taken to the train for the journey to Pretoria where he will be hanged, he says goodbye to Adams. Here there is a hint of physical and emotional contact between the two men, for ‘George Adams saw him on the other side of the wire screen. Fingers with bitten nails touched the screen, and for an infinitesimal instant there was a flicker of light in the cold, grey eyes’.¹³²

For many critics that scene represents the success of Adams’ attempts to ‘get through’ to his fellow prisoners. It also heralds the end of his time in the Isolation Block and his return to the Remand Section. All this offers the reader a sense of closure and containment in setting and narrative technique; it creates a sense of release and resolution in plot and personal dynamics. It also distracts us from the real reasons why Adams wanted the Kid to talk:

I wish he’d talk, say something. It would relieve all this waiting. But he’s slap-happy. Like he’d been in a boxing ring all his life and was slap-happy from it....Anyway, why doesn’t the bugger say something, talk. Bored as hell, and locked up with a slap-happy boy who talked in spasms. I should have asked old Mrs Isaacs to send in a newspaper every day, George Adams thought.¹³³

Here La Guma has deployed a familiar Hemingway technique – repetition – that serves at least three purposes: it shows how language forms Adams’ thoughts, it accentuates the gap between words and that to which they refer, and it highlights the difference between what Adams wants to do and feels that he ought to do.¹³⁴ Conversation with the Kid is clearly a second option. For his part, the Kid regards Adams as ‘strange, but at the same time, an all right bloke’ because he has shared his food and cigarettes. When the Kid does talk, Adams discovers ‘for the first time his bitter and awful presence’. “Jesus,” said George Adams. “You don’t have to talk about it, man”, he

replies to the Kid, who 'pushed on, ignoring the hint'.¹³⁵ At the end Adams can only stutter, "'But-but...Is this true?'"¹³⁶ Initially he is an unwilling listener. At the end he is an incredulous one.

Like the story of the prison 'trial' that precedes the fight between Butcherboy and the Turk, the Kid's story has two narrators.¹³⁷ In the former an omniscient narrator uses the story of the 'trial' to show why the Turk rejects this solution to his conflict with Butcherboy. In the latter we shift from an omniscient narrator to a narrator with a more limited perspective who tries to work out who killed Butcherboy.¹³⁸ In the Kid's confession we shift between the Kid and an omniscient narrator who presents the evidence that the police found at the scene of the crime and interpreted as murder.¹³⁹ The police's explanation is 'simple', and at this point the Kid takes up his own story. He explains to Adams that his mother committed suicide and set up his brutal father so that her death would look like a murder. The Kid was the only witness and could have saved his father, but did not: "'I stood there in the court, mister, and it was as if I saw my mother's ghost rising up behind the Judge'", he tells Adams.¹⁴⁰ Here there are at least two possible source, both of which we can find in the list of writers that La Guma read. There is the detective novel convention in which the detective hero presents the obvious and incorrect version of the crime and then the real, true circumstances, and solves the case. Here the Kid is both villain and victim. There is also the influence of Hemingway in shifts between different narrative perspectives.¹⁴¹

The novel contains several such stories within stories within stories and shifts in perspective, but they do not all serve the same purpose. The novel ends and begins with graffiti that the narrator describes as '[t]wentieth century man forced back to the cave'.¹⁴² The graffiti also bracket the entire novel and are one of the few discursive options available to prisoners. In that respect they function as autobiographies and biographies because they prompt other prisoners to retell these stories: for example, when Morgan told his cellmates the story of Toffy and Bella.¹⁴³ Like La Guma's own short stories, the prisoner stories sometimes end with an ironic twist.¹⁴⁴ In contrast to this is the italicised and indented piece that describes Gus clambering over rooftops on a wet and windy night.¹⁴⁵ Rabkin is wrong when he argues that La Guma wrote this 'in the manner of an eighteenth century novel'. It is a flashback to one of Gus'

experiences as a cat burglar and an ultimately misleading indication that he will escape.

There is another autobiographical dimension. Some of these internal stories are about crime: the Kid tells Adams why he is in jail and why he will hang; the Turk tells Adams why he was arrested.¹⁴⁶ Others such as the description of the heat in the cell, and the prison trial, are told by the narrator and repeat La Guma's earlier work.¹⁴⁷ These show that the narrator and Adams are different from the other prisoners because they are unfamiliar with prison life. Then there are the narrator's descriptions of prison customs and morals: for instance, the technique used to pass tobacco from one cell to another or the fight between Butcherboy and the Turk, which Adams observes. These also highlight his unfamiliarity with prison life, but are sometimes accompanied by ironic asides. There is the way Adams holds the Turk's false teeth during the fight, and his realisation that watching the contest between cat and mouse 'had been as good as going to the pictures, in a place like this' prison.¹⁴⁸ Here La Guma's interest in and enjoyment of popular culture self-consciously undermines the somewhat laboured allegory.¹⁴⁹ Barratt points to the 'resonances of cinematic cliché' in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, and this suggests that La Guma was not always aware of the impact of his cinematic references and that they were not always effective.¹⁵⁰ When La Guma writes that Butcherboy 'flexed his muscles and swelled the tattooed torso so that the pictures writhed like animated cartoons', or when Butcherboy tells the Turk that "'this yard is *mos* getting too small for us two together'" he turns Butcherboy into a caricature of himself.¹⁵¹ On the other hand, when Butcherboy hits Solly and he falls into the assembled column of prisoners so that it 'disrupted, eddied and undulated', La Guma manages to stay on the right side of a cinematic cliché as old as the *Keystone Kops*.¹⁵²

Viewed from this perspective, *The Stone Country* consists of multiple stories and narrative perspectives within a symmetrical form. The novel is divided into two parts and in each part the order of events is similar. But the self-consciousness of this pattern offers a misleading sense of authorial control, for the novel is held together loosely by a central character who has no more power over events than the three prisoners who escape, or the guards of this prison have over its increasingly complex internal

structure.¹⁵³ This affects the way we understand the novel. La Guma might have planned to write a novel with a linear narrative, but there is sufficient evidence to suggest that at this time he was experimenting with different narrative forms, voices and time frames. On the other hand, Blanche la Guma's memories of the period when he wrote it indicate that the published version emerged from a severely disrupted creative process, and that other versions or adaptations which arrests and confiscations interrupted were equally possible. This gives the novel an arbitrary quality. It also suggests that, viewed as whole, the repetitions inherent in the choice of symmetrical structure were not the choice of conscious modernist. Rather they were symptomatic of a desire to remember himself and to be seen as 'a sovereign subject at work'. This and the shifts in narrative perspective, the diverse narrative styles indicative of a desire to combine biography and autobiography, the difficult circumstances under which he wrote, the ironies presented by the narrator and the characters all combine to produce a work that is modernist more in its effect than in its intention.¹⁵⁴

The symmetry of the novel's design is one way in which he attempted to create for himself a sense of order where there was little to speak of, or to order the reader's perception. His use of light and colour, his descriptions of space, and the way in which he composes scenes are others. In *The Stone Country* La Guma's palette contains yellows, blues, purples and lavender, but grey predominates just as it did in *And a Threefold Cord*. In a 'world without beauty; a lunar barrenness of stone and steel and locked doors', where 'no trees grew', it is not surprising that the Casbah Kid had grey eyes, that the early light was a 'dishwater-grey', the walls a battleship grey, or that the shadows displayed a 'greyness'.¹⁵⁵ Light determines, yet it is also an extension of the environment. Initially the sunlight is 'seen through a yellow pane'.¹⁵⁶ Later it is a 'slab...overhead, seeming to mock' the prisoners. Contemplation of the sky cannot release them because even the sunlight is 'imprisoned'.¹⁵⁷ The sunlight also produces compositions and designs, which La Guma interprets in Cubist or geometric terms. These take the form of 'wide triangles and rectangles of grey shadow, all forming a futuristic design in two colours', or a 'pattern of parallel grey lines and garish rectangles'.¹⁵⁸ The bars on a door 'dissected' the guard's face and cap 'into rectangles and small squares...like the parts of a puzzle fitted together', a simile which suggests

that the act of rearranging the pieces of an image is a creative act.¹⁵⁹ Even at night La Guma retains this post-realist perspective, for when Gus looks down on the prison during his escape attempt he sees a 'sprawling pattern of squares and rectangles'.¹⁶⁰ A comparison with a similar scene from *A Walk in the Night* shows how his aerial view of rooftops had remained the same and had changed. Michael Adonis sees 'the roofs of the city...sprawled in a jumble of dark, untidy patterns dotted with the scattered smudged blobs of yellow'.¹⁶¹ For La Guma these experiences represent moments of crisis in the lives of his protagonists – Adonis just before he kills Uncle Doughty and Gus just before he loses his nerve – in a particular way. They see the world as if they are viewing a post-realist landscape – with its flat areas of colour – for the first time – or as if they have momentarily lost the capacity to synthesise their perceptions into a composite and meaningful whole.¹⁶²

This was exactly what the Special Branch wanted

If La Guma's descriptions of fellow prisoners point to ambivalences in his writing there could be no ambivalence or doubt in the expression of his commitment to the liberation struggle, or, correspondingly, any public acknowledgement at that time of its cost to himself and his family. There were good political reasons for this. Placed under house arrest, La Guma's writing became his work and, as this thesis has argued, it enabled him to articulate some of his own desires, needs and fears and the principles and goals of the liberation struggle. However, there were still limitations to what he could say about himself. For that he returned to painting – a non-textual medium. In this section I will argue that this return fulfilled several personal and political needs. By combining psychoanalytic and landscape theory in my analysis of La Guma's copy of a Brueghel painting, I explore areas of La Guma's life which he attempted to hide from himself but could not hide from those around him.¹⁶³

La Guma was less articulate in speech than on paper. According to Sachs, he was 'so fluent in his writing and yet inhibited, at times almost tongue-tied, in his speech. If you saw him in a group he would have less to say than most'. For Sachs, La Guma was 'normally genial, amused and quiet', but beneath this was 'a lot of anger'.¹⁶⁴ To others such as Nkosi, whom La Guma did not know so well or who did not share his political

convictions, he might seem 'cold and austere' at first.¹⁶⁵ Nkosi remembers him from the Treason Trial as 'a quiet, brooding figure'. This partly coincides with the impressions he made on his former classmates at Trafalgar High School mentioned in Chapter Three. During the Treason Trial, wrote Nkosi, La Guma did not say much.

Nevertheless, his weekly column in *New Age*, especially the trial proceedings, was marked by a cruel wit, sharp discernment and mocking humour which made it highly readable. I think it was always this divergence of personality from what his work promised which always surprised me. To meet him in person and to discover that he was not at all like his writing was always disconcerting. What in heaven's name, you found yourself asking, was the source of all that gaiety and wit to be found in his writing?... As if to complete the mystery, his wife, Blanche, seemed to emphasise this contrast, for she was livelier, gayer, more approachable. I had heard her once deliver before a national conference of nurses – she was a nurse at the time – a scathingly funny attack on the Government plans to introduce apartheid in nursing. On the other hand, Alex La Guma remained impenetrable to me.¹⁶⁶

According to Sachs, La Guma used writing as 'a means of achieving dignity, dignity for himself...dignity for all the oppressed in South Africa and eventually dignity for the non-racial society in which he believed so strongly'. He shared these goals with his wife and his comrades, and together they established 'very powerful communities of like-minded people sharing these goals, sharing the dangers... We lived the Freedom Charter in our day-to-day political lives, first openly and publicly and then in underground resistance'.¹⁶⁷ Once La Guma was placed under house arrest and banned, his contact with this sustaining community was severely circumscribed. So too was the ability to write, as my analysis of *The Stone Country* has shown. La Guma did receive visits from people like Alf Wannenburg and Richard Rive, who occasionally brought along one of his students, but for the most part all political contact came through Blanche, whose profession made it relatively easy to meet a variety of people.¹⁶⁸

On one occasion, when Barney Desai dissolved the CPC she took messages from La Guma to the CPC branches informing them of developments and asking for their responses. She also distributed leaflets by putting them in her delivery bag:

And I went past roadblocks like that [clicking fingers]. I said 'If you open my bag it is unsterile... and I can't deliver my babies'.... So I come back the second time with my second lot of leaflets... and they say 'Laat vir haar deurgaan. Ons het haar al klaar gekyk. Sy's 'n verpleegster.' [Let her t through. We have already checked her out. She's a nurse.] And I delivered all those leaflets from the Congress Alliance.¹⁶⁹

However, none of these successes could have made up for the sense of isolation or ameliorated the strain which banning, house arrest, detention without trial, unpredictable security police raids and harassment placed upon her husband. It appears that two security policemen – Genis and Van Wyk – were responsible for harassing La Guma and his family. Eugene, the La Guma's elder son, took a special responsibility for protecting his father's writing. According to Blanche, after a particularly big raid in 1963, 'Eugene dashed in from school... and lifted the mattress in his room [and said] "And they've taken that also, and I didn't look after Daddy's stuff", because he felt that he was put in charge of looking after these things and now they have gone'.¹⁷⁰ On another occasion, the La Gumas received a visit from Ahmed Osman. He was not a banned person, so no laws prevented him from meeting them, but he had received a six-month sentence for refusing to give evidence for the state and was waiting to go to prison.¹⁷¹

There was nothing in the documents to say that I couldn't speak with him and he can't speak with me... He was not banned. So of course, he came and Alex was inside... and then suddenly Eugene [was shouting] 'Mummy! Genis and Van Wyk are coming!' Alex had a chance to get into the study and close the door. And of course they immediately said that he [Eugene] had given a tip that they were coming and they started smacking and bashing him around in

front of us. And Alex says 'Why hit my child?' [And they replied] 'Shut up or we'll chuck him in jail as well.' Well of course we shut up, and then when they left I said to Alex, 'I think that it's time that we leave.' And Alex said to me, 'You're thinking of Eugene. Have you thought of all the other children? Eugene will have to take his chances with the rest.' And I went to the toilet and wept bitterly. But I also thought, 'Yes, I am thinking only of him, and there are other children. We'll just have to bite it through.'¹⁷²

There were other occasions when Genis and Van Wyk would harass Eugene and Barto on their way home from school, beating them and demanding the names of the people who had visited their father.¹⁷³ Isolated, unwilling to move, unable to predict when the security police might raid, unable to protect his family or for his family members to protect him from them, La Guma's decision to copy a work by Pieter Brueghel known as *The Conversion of St Paul* or *The Conversion of Saul* (1567) – a religious painting in a landscape setting – made sense for at least three reasons. Firstly, it took up time, and he had plenty of that at this disposal. Secondly, the security police would not regard it as 'subversive' or illegal because it was in another language. Thirdly, it represented a cry of pain and personal and political impotence that he could not express because he was committed to the position that at any price he had to remain 'strong'. There was no other option at that time, but the result, in the longer term, was what Blanche has described as a 'nervous breakdown'.

He was an active person politically. Intellectually active. Stifled. Then at one stage he went totally berserk.... It was really bad.... I knew then that it had got to him, and I felt that he should have left earlier rather than stick it out and be the strong revolutionary.... He was not aware of what was happening. I knew what was happening...this was exactly what the Special Branch wanted. The children said 'My Daddy's not well tonight'. 'No, your Daddy isn't well...house arrest is getting him down.' And I tried to explain to them, telling them the truth...this is what they do to people...and that is what your Daddy is fighting against.... That was the only time he went off.¹⁷⁴

After speaking to partners of others in similar circumstances, Blanche realized that her husband's actions were one of a range of possible responses to the torture that the security police inflicted on their opponents.¹⁷⁵ In any event it was preferable to Beyleveld's response. It will be recalled that Beyleveld had been SACPO's candidate in the 1958 campaign to elect progressive white representatives who would put forward the Congress Alliance's position in parliament. Now he had turned state witness in a trial of former comrades. To them, Beyleveld was 'no longer a man'. For Fred Carneson's wife Sarah – La Guma would be arrested and detained without trial as a potential witness in his trial – Beyleveld had 'sold his manhood to become a special branch paper doll. For him one can only feel sick.'¹⁷⁶ Nevertheless, Blanche felt that the situation had become intolerable and dangerous for the family as a whole. Alex was not to take out his anger and frustrations on his family.¹⁷⁷

It has not been possible to determine exactly when La Guma copied the painting.¹⁷⁸ It could not have been in early 1966 because he was in solitary confinement then, and Blanche does not recall him painting it in the early 1960s. It seems likely that he worked on it during 1964 or 1965. La Guma's decision to copy the painting was indicative of his emotional and psychological state. At the same time, it indicated that his life had already broken down in many ways. This suggests that we should not view the decision to copy the painting and the copy itself as response to a single event. Instead we should see it as a response to that series of events which comprised the torture to which he was subjected. The decision and the act of copying became La Guma's way of describing his trauma. By trauma I mean a 'break in life's continuity'. This break prompts the subject to seek forms or discourses of defence against threatening experiences such as disintegration or anxiety.¹⁷⁹ It also precipitates mourning for the loss of a sense of personal coherence.

Copying may be a form of plagiarism or a way of drawing on the intended reader's knowledge of shared cultural and political experiences. It may also be a form of homage and a way of trying to understand the techniques of a particular writer or painter with a view to their use in another context. We saw this in La Guma's reworking of Hemingway's play 'To-day is Friday' and *The Grapes of Wrath*. In the

case of *The Stone Country* – with its references to *The Talisman* and the (to date) anonymous American authors – La Guma's conscious motives are less obvious, though their contribution to notions of hierarchy and degeneration are clear enough. Psychoanalytic concepts may help us to understand some of the deeper reasons why La Guma copied *The Conversion*. They may facilitate access to La Guma's emotional state at the time by providing access to the 'unthought known'. Their application may enable us to reconstitute the subject by gaining access to the unconscious.¹⁸⁰

In part I have based the interpretation that I advance here on theories about modernist landscapes. I assume that if a modernist painting is not necessarily 'painted either with or for the eyes' then this might apply to a copy of a painting.¹⁸¹ As a copy it is a repetition and an interpretation, and it therefore carries significance derived from the decision to copy and from the object copied.¹⁸² I also assume that the person who views the painting, and this includes the person who copies it, is able 'to adopt the imaginary position of the viewer of the represented *scene*' and that the composition of the painting, i.e. the relationships between the processes and objects depicted, creates the conditions for the viewer's 'imaginary position' and for identification with objects, characters or symbols in the painting.¹⁸³ This in turn creates the conditions for an interpretation that painter, copier and viewer may share.

Harrison's concern with modernist landscapes does not preclude the application of his ideas to a non-modernist work such as *The Conversion*. Our understanding of the effectiveness of a modernist landscape relies on a distinction between 'what the painting *does*' and 'how it appears' and we have already seen in this chapter that La Guma as narrator presents characters with that distinction immediately before they experience a crisis. If we accept the possibility of a viewer's 'imaginary position', then we can argue that La Guma's decision to copy *The Conversion* and the process of copying could provide him, and us, with the opportunity to make this distinction between 'does' and 'how'. Secondly, for Harrison the modernist landscape is a potential 'resource for the symbolisation of an already represented world'.¹⁸⁴ My argument here is that in La Guma's case we should see his decision to copy and the process of copying *The Conversion* as an investment of his feelings in the painting and not as a declaration of religious faith. The scene of *The Conversion* represented his

emotions. In other words *The Conversion* became something more than 'itself'; it became 'other than a painting of a landscape' and 'other than' a religious painting. Harrison's distinction between a copy's appearance and its effect enables us to accommodate and explore the attraction to La Guma, an atheist and communist, of a Christian religious theme in a landscape setting.¹⁸⁵ Here we return to psychoanalytic theory.

The most significant limitations to my analysis are that very few of La Guma's paintings have survived and that I have not yet found his copy of *The Conversion* – if it still exists.¹⁸⁶ Firstly, I am more concerned with the painting's significance for La Guma than with his actual copy, therefore my analysis requires only a reproduction of the original rather than La Guma's original copy. Secondly, while Brueghel's total output contains many paintings with satirical, moral, religious and landscape features, my research to date does not (yet) indicate whether La Guma had a wide range of paintings by Bruegel or any other artist from which he could choose.¹⁸⁷ Accordingly, my analysis focuses less on La Guma's *choice* than on factors that may have encouraged his interest in Brueghel's work and in the conditions surrounding La Guma's reproduction of this painting. Thirdly, my impressions are limited and determined by what Blanche la Guma has remembered and said about the work and what she as interviewee, and I as interviewer, may have consciously or unconsciously attributed to it. I cannot be sure of the extent to which my recourse to psychoanalytic theory has created the object of my enquiry or, having taken on that body of knowledge, the extent to which I can use it to assess the validity of my enquiry into that object.

These *caveats* aside, my hypothesis about *The Conversion's* association with the trauma of breakdown conformed to the generally sombre quality of La Guma's paintings that other people have remembered. Sadie Forman has described a painting, now lost, that La Guma gave to her late husband Lionel on the latter's twenty-first birthday:

The painting was of Alex at a table, his head resting sideways on one hand, his legs stretched out, slouching, and a bottle of wine on the table. As I

remember, one had the impression that his eyes were half-hooded with drink and that his mood was one of despairing. Alex must have been about 18 when he painted it.¹⁸⁸

Albie Sachs also remembers that painting. The other memory comes from Alf Wannenburg who recalls a work that hung in Jimmy la Guma's old home in District Six. According to Wannenburg,

[it was] obviously [a scene] after a police attack on a workers' demonstration. It was like Mexican mural art at that stage...and it was painted on canvas and stretched on a frame like an old cupboard door or something, so it was a little soft, and it was painted in very flat areas of colour, and there were those two chaps carrying somebody who had obviously been beaten up by the police, all with looks of bitter downcast resentment on their faces, very kind of square features... The characters were clearly coloured. He was painting about his own working-class people in conflict with society and the government... fairly lumpy sort of figures...¹⁸⁹

When Wannenburg told La Guma that he liked it, he gave it to him. Some seven years later, when Wannenburg had to leave his own home in a hurry for political reasons, the painting also disappeared.¹⁹⁰

From a painterly perspective, La Guma liked Brueghel's use of colour and the sense of movement in many of his works, and in exile he had a book of Brueghel's paintings. According to Blanche, he liked Brueghel's work because 'there was always something going on' in his paintings.¹⁹¹ Several aspects of Brueghel's reception over the last ninety years provide a context for La Guma's interest in and attraction to his work. By the early twentieth century, critics no longer viewed Brueghel as a 'primitive' or as a painter of peasant origin. Instead, they stressed his secular carnivalesque and peasant paintings for their 'power of observation and... understanding of man'.¹⁹² This interpretation presents Brueghel as sympathetic to the 'ordinary' working person. It is also compatible with La Guma's politics, the

approach to life painting to which he had been exposed, the 'genre' quality of his writings which focused largely on the coloured lumpen-proletariat and working class, his use of vernacular language forms in his journalism and fiction, and his defence of institutions such as the Coon Carnival.¹⁹³

Brueghel's compositional devices also attracted the attention of critics. Here it was argued that 'an essential characteristic of Brueghel's art was the tendency to simplify and reduce the natural forms to elementary stereometrical shapes (globes, cones, cylinders, etc.) which [had] the effect of making familiar things look unfamiliar and strange'.¹⁹⁴ This finds its textual complement in La Guma's second novel, *And a Threefold Cord*. In this novel he describes Missus Nzuba in Brueghelesque terms as a 'series of connected ovals, spheres, ellipses and sundry bulges representing head, torso, arms and legs'.¹⁹⁵ We have already seen that in *The Stone Country* he described the fat guard as 'heavy and paunchy and... constructed from a series of soft, smoothly jointed sacs' and that at times La Guma displayed a cubist sensibility.¹⁹⁶

Not all of Brueghel's or La Guma's work shared the humorous and parodic quality of carnival as a celebration of social, sexual and physical disorder through the depiction of 'the material body as a pleasurable grotesquerie'.¹⁹⁷ According to Grossman, Brueghel's religious works articulate an extremely 'pessimistic view of mankind, of the "topsy-turvy world"'.¹⁹⁸ If carnival was associated with important days in the Christian calendar such as Shrove Tuesday, then the transgressions that its grotesqueries initiated were also what Stallybrass and White have described as a 'boundary phenomenon of hybridisation or inmixing, in which self and other become enmeshed in an inclusive, heterogeneous, dangerously unstable zone'.¹⁹⁹ By 'other' I mean an entity that is everything that self is and is not. For instance, if the self is normally experienced as given, stable, and coherent, then the other is experienced as 'provisional and on the edge of falling to pieces'.²⁰⁰ If the self is experienced as a meaningful entity then the other is a 'terrifying emptiness'. If the self can be described, then the other must be beyond description. At the same time, however, it must also be capable of re-presentation and therefore of repetition so that in its own way it becomes 'an organising principle' and the site of a signifying process.²⁰¹

This is precisely what *The Conversion* offers, for conversion is a process in which 'self and other become enmeshed'. Conversion is a process the success of which depends on its incompleteness *and* its irrevocability. In this process the new and opposite identity must always have been a possibility for the self that continues to depend on that which it has superseded yet can never fully disown. Further, like the experience of trauma, the acknowledgement of conversion is only possible after the fact. Unable to talk about this experience of breaking down but compelled to articulate it, for La Guma Brueghel's painting provided a useful and ready-made symbolic object through which he could re-present trauma without having to mention it.

This suggests the possibility of two interpretations that draw on psychoanalysis for the reasons why La Guma copied *The Conversion*. The first draws on Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Here the process of copying is a process of self-empowerment – of 'remembering, repeating and working through'. Copying as a form of repetition would enable La Guma to turn what Freud described as 'a *passive* situation – he was overpowered by the experience [of the breakdown]' into something over which he had the impression of greater control. Thus, 'by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was... he took an active part' and so was able to accommodate it.²⁰² However, this interpretation does not fully account for the personal and political powerlessness and isolation that La Guma experienced at this time. Nor does it take into account the implications of *copying* or of the contemplation of that copy. Here the concepts of 'projection' and 'projective identification' appear more accommodating and encompassing. By copying the painting, La Guma could project these experiences; literally, he could put them outside of himself and invest them in the painting. But as a copy, his work lacked the originality that might have enabled him to feel that he had successfully put aside or outside himself those emotions which it symbolised. Secondly, by identifying himself with Saul he returned to himself that which he had put out of himself. It came back to him in the form of an experience of being attacked by the very experiences from which he had sought relief.²⁰³ In this way the decision to copy *The Conversion* opened the door to an 'inclusive, heterogeneous and dangerously unstable zone' where 'self and other [had] become enmeshed'. This zone was inhabited

by a subject who experienced 'personal and social life as a maelstrom', and who mourned loss of himself as a 'sovereign subject and work'.²⁰⁴

If we examine the painting, we see that Saul's fall is in the middle distance and slightly below the line of the horizon to his left. As a result the horizon seems simultaneously close and distant. Comprising a relatively small part of the work, most of which has trees and a rockface as its background, the horizon contributes to formation of the 'imaginary position' already mentioned and, in relation to the rockface, to an effect of simultaneous release and damming up.²⁰⁵ The work as a whole is composed on the basis of opposites – distant/close, light/dark, low/high, open/contained – divided but not mediated by the figure of Saul as he falls from his horse. From this perspective the painting's landscape features contest its religious aspects. As a result, Saul's status is unclear. As Harrison's observations on Corot's *Souvenir of Lake Nemi* (1865) suggest, 'where we expect the ground to serve as context for the figure, it is...the figure that serves to enhance the meaning and the atmospheric charge of the world that includes it'.²⁰⁶ Saul is literally central to the painting's subject matter yet a relatively insignificant detail in the work as a whole.

Like Saul in Brueghel's painting, La Guma was a man surrounded by others who watched him from a distance as he fell. Saul has just fallen from his horse, struck down by a mighty power visible only through its effects – a shaft of light, the space around him and the fall itself. Behind Saul to the left and right are cypress trees – symbols of death. Saul is a figure in the middle distance surrounded by his soldiers and entourage who observe him. Only one figure appears to aid him. To the left the mountain drops away to the plains from which he has ascended via a steep, narrow path. If the journey thus far has been difficult, it will be no easier ahead. To the right the way ahead lies via an equally narrow defile already occupied by his soldiers some of whom have turned back towards him. Past and future move towards each other, yet are separated by an empty space – the unfathomable present.

Only one figure looks outward, but even his gaze is directed towards another figure in the foreground who already faces inwards towards Saul. Thus the moment of isolation that characterises Brueghel's depiction of the conversion, the painting's indifference to its subject matter and the absence of a gaze out of the painting to the

viewer all complement each other. This establishes a process of 'projective identification' in the relationship between composition and copier. Hanna Segal defines projective identification as the 'result of the projection of parts of the self into an object. It may result in the object being perceived as having acquired the characteristics of the projected part of the self but it can also result in the self becoming identified with the object of its projection.'²⁰⁷

According to Blanche la Guma, her husband did not *talk* about the stress that he was experiencing. In *The Stone Country* he inscribed the memory of a sovereign subject at work by incorporating material he had already written. His decision to copy of *The Conversion* suggests that the coherence and control he desired was – for a while at least – beyond his grasp. The tension between acknowledging, symbolically articulating and trying to contain the sensation of his own world turning upside down and breaking down is painfully expressed in this painting. This identification with the object of projection is a function of the relation between the internal dynamics of the gaze in the painting – none of its figures establishes contact with the viewer – and La Guma the copier and isolated activist who was determined to hide his feelings but was compelled to express them symbolically. He did this by producing a painting which was and was not his own.

La Guma's choice of subject matter also suggests the operation of what Green has termed 'projection by externalising'. Similar to Segal's 'projective identification', projection by externalising enabled La Guma to express his emotional and political predicament because it offered 'a means of defence against the internal by means of a counter-excitation'. The process of externalisation occurs when the subject interprets an 'internal excitation' as a perception. In other words, he expresses something that is inside himself as if it were an 'external excitation'. However, this form of projection offers incomplete or temporary release. Once transformed into a perception, it 'provokes a partial reincorporation of the excorporated'. In La Guma's case, what he had expelled by copying returns through the recognition of himself in the object copied. Like the soldiers at the head of the column who have gone forward but who now return – symbols of the persecution to which the very man who had sent them ahead will experience as a direct consequence of his own past – the projected trauma

returns to attack the subject. 'It is as if,' observes Green, 'whatever the effort to expel the bad, something were opposed to its loss.' The consequence is 'a return to the previous state, be it unpleasant or even unbearable'.²⁰⁸ Under these circumstances, the case, then the investments that La Guma made in *The Conversion* provided relief at a cost, for they would be accompanied by repetition of the experiences of isolation, disempowerment and repression – all significant features of his life at this stage and a consequence of his resistance to the apartheid state.²⁰⁹

The decision to copy *The Conversion* enabled La Guma to speak without writing, but only by reawakening the sources of his own pain. In my analysis I have shown that La Guma refused to acknowledge Steinbeck's 'inheritance', and that the repetition of his own work in *The Stone Country* affirmed his existence as a writer to himself. By contrast, the copy of *Conversion* shows that the compulsion to repeat committed him to an endless cycle of emotional release and imprisonment.

I nearly choked on that message that you sent me

By early 1966 the liberation movement realised that his continued presence in South Africa served little purpose and instructed him to leave. In December 1965, Fred Carneson was arrested and held under the 180-day detention law, and in January the following year he was charged with sabotage.²¹⁰ There were three additional charges under the Suppression of Communism Act that led to the arrest of five others, among them Sachs and La Guma.²¹¹ The trial started at the end of March. The prosecution alleged that between 8 April 1960 and 13 December 1965 Carneson had been 'attending, advising and addressing meetings of the Communist Party of South Africa held together with Jean de Crespigny, Allan Keith Brooks, Alexander La Guma, Bernard Gottschalk and Albert Louis Sachs'.²¹²

According to Sachs, La Guma was part of an 'underground resistance grouping [consisting of] members of the Communist Party who were also active with the ANC, trade unions and a number of other bodies':

We used to meet at what Fred [Carneson] called 'our executive board room'.
It was under a tree either at Kirstenbosch or above Kirstenbosch – Newlands

forest somewhere – sometimes in the rain, or sometimes on the slopes of Table Mountain....Alex was certainly part of that group. It was very dangerous meeting there because most of us were banned. To be in each other's presence would have been a violation of the law, independently of the actual content of what we discussed. Fred was certainly the bravest of all of us and carried on with what was in effect full-time political work. And once Alex was subjected to house arrest [December 1962] he wasn't able to attend any of the meetings.²¹³

La Guma was arrested in early 1966. This affected Eugene very badly, for he collapsed when he saw his father being taken away.²¹⁴ La Guma was not held under the same conditions as Carneson, who received ruthless treatment from the security police. One of Carneson's daughters recalls seeing him after he had been interrogated:

He is so thin, he looks as if he has come out of a concentration camp. He is having difficulty walking and holds on to the counter for support....He looks so much older. Very old. I realize with a shock that he has lost all his teeth. He has a look of exhausted and bewildered desolation. He says very quickly to me before he can be interrupted,

“Let them know the methods made it impossible not to crack. Other people must be prepared for this.”

....

He leans forward and I realize he is having difficulty hearing me. I raise my voice a little.

“They have damaged my hearing.”²¹⁵

La Guma and Sachs were held under the 1966 Criminal Procedure Amendment Act. This enabled the attorney-general to hold potential witnesses in prison for a period of 180 days. Neither was charged or brought to trial. This was part of a broader trend. Between 1965 and 1967 almost 400 people detained under the 180-day laws for this purpose, but less than half were called as witnesses.²¹⁶

The La Gumas received instructions to leave South Africa while he was in jail. Though the CPC was never banned, by that stage there was little it could do and there were divisions and splits in its external formations. In October 1965, the London Committee of the CPC accused Barney Desai of acting ‘in a manner... contrary to the policy of the Coloured Peoples Congress’ and of forming an alliance with the PAC.²¹⁷ Later Desai and Peake joined the PAC. In the years preceding the 1969 Morogoro conference that opened external ANC membership to non-Africans, there was considerable debate among exiled activists who were members of the ANC and its sister organisations about the most appropriate forms of political and military struggle. There was also discussion about how members of the various congresses could and should contribute.²¹⁸ This did not imply that the ANC and its Alliance partners had discarded the framework offered in the 1950s by the debates on the national question. At least one of the documents emerging from those discussions criticised the ultra-left position that ‘Coloureds... were not a national group’.²¹⁹ Acknowledging the absence of ‘formally constituted organisations able to elect delegates to a conference or mandate them’, another document proposed that ‘a top level selection of leaders should be convened whose authority and standing is such that it is not likely to be challenged.’ La Guma’s name was among those put forward as a participant in a meeting scheduled for October 1966 on that issue.²²⁰ Between his arrival in Britain and the Morogoro conference, in his capacity as Chairperson of its London Committee, La Guma would represent the CPC at several fora, including the United Nations.²²¹

Blanche received a message that they should leave. But how to communicate it to her husband in jail? La Guma had made it clear to her that he would not testify against Carneson, and had refused to consider exile. This would be a sign of weakness to the enemy and a dereliction of his duty to the liberation struggle. She had been taking food to him, and managed to insert a small message into a potato:

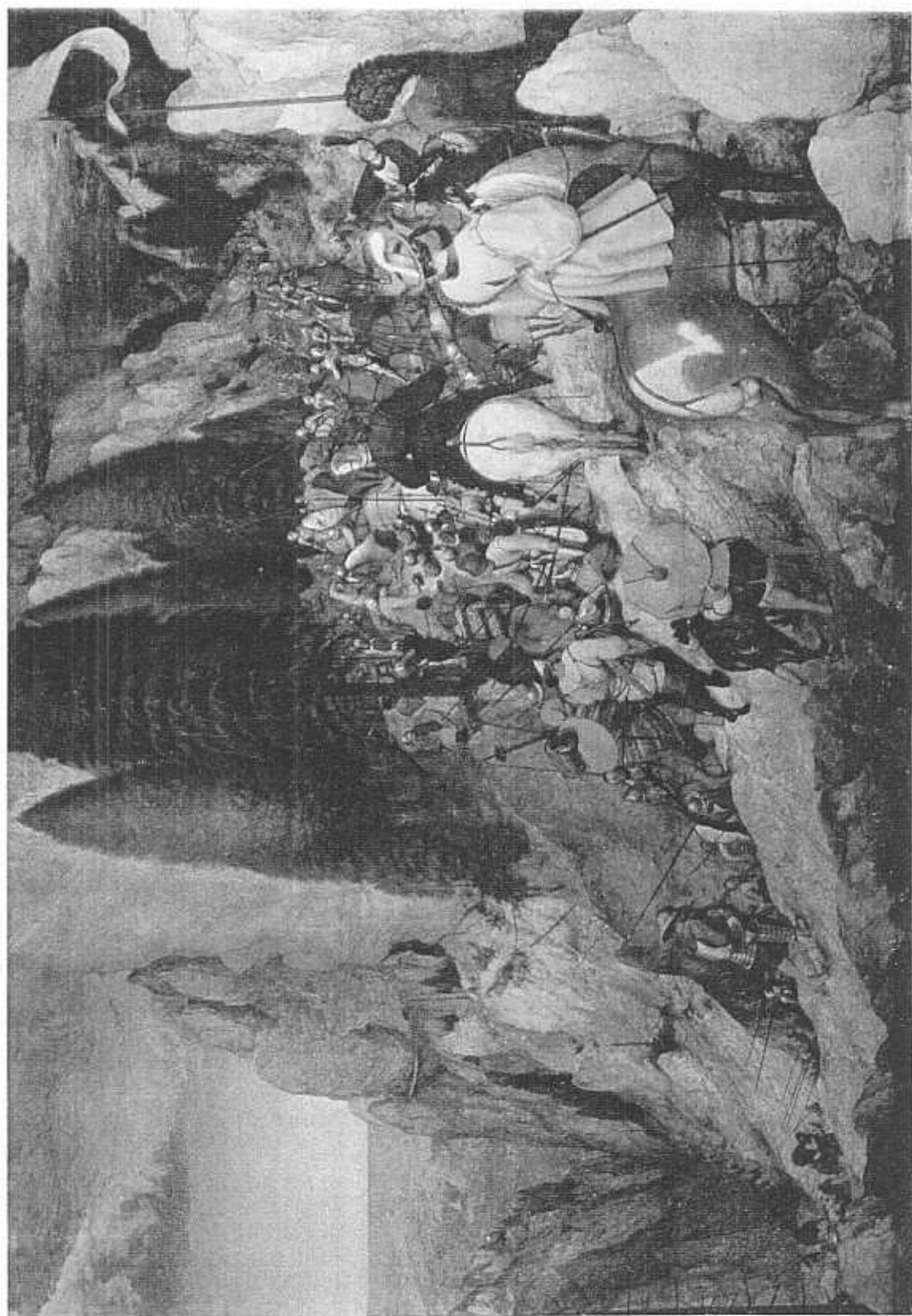
I used to take food to him every night, bad a cook as I was. I baked a pie and Alex was very fond of potatoes... and of course I put one small potato in and in that potato – I’ve never written anything so small – and I put on there ‘Think of leaving **decided**’.... When he came out [I knew] there would be a

tremendous fallout, because I thought he's going to really accuse me of planning to get him out against his will... [When he was released] he says to me, 'Well, since I nearly choked on that message that you sent me, I think that we will have to go since it has been decided.'²²²

La Guma was among ten people released in April 1966 at the conclusion of evidence in Carneson's trial. In June several of them, including the La Gumas, applied for exit permits to leave South Africa and for permission to live and work in the United Kingdom.²²³ Since banning and house arrest restrictions prevented them from travelling to the British consulate, a consular representative visited them. In August 1966 they received permission from the Department of the Interior to leave South Africa permanently.²²⁴ The next problem that they faced was getting to the airport because they were both banned and their movements were severely restricted. Taxi drivers were too afraid to take them to the airport, as was the wife of Blanche's brother. Eventually a friend took them. The family had to leave at a specific time, follow a designated route, and check in at a certain time:

We had security branch on either side of the car driving right through to the airport...and when we got to the airport Eugene looked up and he says, 'Mommy! There's Mr Genis and there's Mr Van Wyk!' They were there – lined up. There was a huge crowd of people at the airport as we came through....It was all the crowd from Paarl, Worcester, Wellington, you mention it – all come to see us off with loads of chocolates and all the dried fruit that the Boland could produce. It was so terrible...because our banning orders still stood. Alex had to stand over there and look that way because he hadn't to communicate – any nod or wink is a communication...and they [family members] must not come to us more than two at a time to come and say goodbye. The result was that I never said goodbye to...my mother. It was just one mad whirl...and on the plane it didn't stop there because we had to stop at Johannesburg. We took another plane from Johannesburg. The plane came and we were gone.²²⁵

Eventually they were in Kenyan airspace. 'And I said to him, 'God, I could do with a stiff whisky. That's how I feel now.'



Endnotes

- ¹ Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History*, p. 404.
- ² Lodge, *Black politics in South Africa since 1945*, pp. 231, 241, 247.
- ³ D. Foster, *Detention and Torture in South Africa: Psychological, legal and historical studies* (David Phillip, Cape Town, 1987), p. 26.
- ⁴ 'South African Coloured Peoples Congress London Committee: Circular to Organisations' (London, 20 October 1965), Brian Bunting Collection; Lodge, *Black politics in South Africa*, p. 301.
- ⁵ *Cape Times*, 17 February 1964.
- ⁶ *Cape Times*, 5 May 1964 and 11 May 1964.
- ⁷ *Cape Argus*, 2 September 1964.
- ⁸ *Cape Argus*, 2 September 1964; *Cape Times*, 23 December 1964.
- ⁹ *Cape Times*, 23 December 1964.
- ¹⁰ Albie Sachs interview, 11 December 2000.
- ¹¹ United Nations' Declaration Against Torture (adopted 9 December 1975), cited by D. Foster, *Detention and Torture in South Africa*, p. 68.
- ¹² C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. 99; Blanche la Guma interviewed by B. Chandramohan, in B. Chandramohan, *A Study of Trans-Ethnicity in Modern South Africa*, p. 212.
- ¹³ A. la Guma, *The Stone Country* (Heinemann, London, 1982), p. 20.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 49.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 79.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 127.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 131.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 135.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 165, 92.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 139.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 139, 140.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 159.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 157.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 112.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 168.
- ²⁸ G. Perkins, B. Perkins and P. Leninger, *Benet's Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature* (Harper Collins, New York, 1992), p. 247; J.D. Hart (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to American Literature* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1983), p. 190.
- ²⁹ B. Rogers, *Debs: His Life, Writings and Speeches* (The Appeal to Reason, Girard, 1908), p. 495.
- ³⁰ *Cape Standard*, 4 April 1944.
- ³¹ La Guma, *The Stone Country*, p. 7.
- ³² Albie Sachs interview, 11 December 2000.
- ³³ La Guma, *The Stone Country*, pp. 51-52.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 81.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- ³⁷ Foster, *Detention and Torture in South Africa*, p. 123.
- ³⁸ *The Stone Country*, p. 17.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- ⁴¹ D. Schalkwyk, 'The Rules of Physiognomy: reading the convict in South African prison writing', *Pretexts: studies in writing and culture*, 7, 1, 1998, p. 88.
- ⁴² La Guma, 'Law of the Jungle', p. 18.

- ⁴³ Schalkwyk, 'The Rules of Physiognomy', p. 88; B. Chandramohan, *A Study in Trans-Ethnicity*, p. 146.
- ⁴⁴ La Guma, in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 114.
- ⁴⁵ La Guma, 'Out of Darkness', p. 22.
- ⁴⁶ La Guma, *The Stone Country*, p. 85.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 96.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 75, 67.
- ⁵⁰ La Guma, *The Stone Country*, p. 61.
- ⁵¹ A. la Guma, 'Out of Darkness', p. 21.
- ⁵² A. la Guma, 'Tattoo Marks and Nails', 98.
- ⁵³ W. Scott, *The Talisman* (Adam and Charles Black, Edinburgh, 1877), p. 12.
- ⁵⁴ La Guma, *The Stone Country*, pp. 38, 66.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 83.
- ⁵⁶ Scott, *The Talisman*, p. 12.
- ⁵⁷ La Guma, *The Stone Country*, pp. 38, 66.
- ⁵⁸ Scott, *The Talisman*, p. 31.
- ⁵⁹ La Guma, *The Stone Country*, p. 82; A. la Guma, *And a Threefold Cord*, p. 24.
- ⁶⁰ K. Balutansky, *The Novels of Alex La Guma*, p. 69.
- ⁶¹ W. Scott, *Quentin Durward* (Adam and Charles Black, Edinburgh, 1877), p. 585; Scott, *The Talisman*, p. 114.
- ⁶² La Guma, *The Stone Country*, p. 88; Scott, *The Talisman*, p. 118.
- ⁶³ E. Mphahlele, 'My Experience as a Writer', in M.J. Daymond, J.U. Jacobs, M. Lenta (eds), *Momentum: On Recent South African Writing* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1984), p. 75; R. Rive, *Writing Black*, p. 9.
- ⁶⁴ La Guma, *A Soviet Journey*, p. 223.
- ⁶⁵ La Guma, 'The Real Picture', p. 18.
- ⁶⁶ La Guma, *A Soviet Journey*, p. 154; La Guma, 'Law of the Jungle', p. 17.
- ⁶⁷ K. Balutansky, *The Novels of Alex La Guma*, p. 2.
- ⁶⁸ Tylor quoted in G.W. Stocking, *Race, Culture and Evolution* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1968), p. 116.
- ⁶⁹ M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* Vol. I (Vintage Books, New York, 1980), p. 118.
- ⁷⁰ *The Sun*, 7 October 1938.
- ⁷¹ W. Carpenter, "'Ovals, Spheres, Ellipses, and Sundry Bulges": Alex La Guma Imagines the Human Body', p. 80.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- ⁷³ Carpenter, nter, "' m .Ures, Ellipses, and Sundry Bulges" ...', p. 89; D. Riemenschneider, 'The Prisoner in South African Fiction: Alex la Guma's novels *The Stone Country* and *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*', *ACLALS Bulletin*, 5, 3, 1980, p. 147.
- ⁷⁴ M. Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (Routledge, London, 1968), p. 246.
- ⁷⁵ G. Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (Merlin, London, 1978), p. 56.
- ⁷⁶ *Cape Standard*, 18 September 1945.
- ⁷⁷ A la Guma, 'The Coons', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp.113-114; S. Jeppie, 'Aspects of Popular Culture and Class Expression in Inner Cape Town, circa 1935-1959' (University of Cape Town, M.A. dissertation, 1990), p. 41.
- ⁷⁸ Albie Sachs interview.
- ⁷⁹ La Guma, *The Stone Country*, p. 122.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 75.
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- ⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 65, 66, 67, 86.
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 35, 59, 140, 186.
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18, 22, 59, 61, 63, 107.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 63, 75.
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 99.

- ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 26.
- ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63, 61.
- ⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76, 111.
- ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 97; 107; Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, p. 95; Albie Sachs interview.
- ⁹² La Guma, *The Stone Country*, p. 18.
- ⁹³ Albie Sachs interview; A. Sachs, *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs* (Harvill Press, London, 1966), pp. 15-26.
- ⁹⁴ La Guma, *The Stone Country*, pp. 72, 112.
- ⁹⁵ M. Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (Verso, London, 1990), p. 345.
- ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 346.
- ⁹⁷ D. Brutus, 'African Thought', in C. Abrahams (ed), *Imagining Home*, p. 4.
- ⁹⁸ La Guma, quoted in C. Abrahams, *Alex la Guma*, pp. 87, 92, 96.
- ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 87.
- ¹⁰⁰ G. Cornwell, 'Protest in fiction: an approach to Alex la Guma' (Rhodes University, M.A. thesis, 1979), p. 34.
- ¹⁰¹ L. Nkosi, 'Alex La Guma: The Man and His Work', *South African Information and Analysis*, January 1968, pp. 7-8.
- ¹⁰² J.M. Coetzee, 'Man's Fate in the Novels of Alex la Guma', in *Doubling the Point*, p. 355.
- ¹⁰³ La Guma, *The Stone Country*, p. 74.
- ¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 38, 24-5, 67, 132.
- ¹⁰⁵ A.R. JanMohamed, 'Alex La Guma: The Literary and Political Functions of Marginality in the Colonial Situation', p. 279; J. Mkhize, 'Social Realism in Alex la Guma's Longer Fiction', p. 37; J. Mkhize, "'Road to Consciousness": *And a Threefold Cord* and *The Stone Country*', p. 163.
- ¹⁰⁶ B. Chandramohan, *A Study in Trans-Ethnicity in Modern South Africa*, pp. 106, 111, 113.
- ¹⁰⁷ La Guma, *The Stone Country*, p. 58; C. Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, pp. 88-89; S.O. Asein, 'Symbolic Setting in the South African Novel', p. 219; B. Chandramohan, *A Study in Trans-Ethnicity in Modern South Africa*, p. 22; J.M. Coetzee, 'Man's Fate in the Novels of Alex la Guma', p. 355;
- ¹⁰⁸ D. Riemenschneider, 'The Prisoner in South African Fiction: Alex la Guma's novels', pp. 147-8; H. Barratt, 'South Africa's Dark Night: Metaphor and Symbol in La Guma's Fiction', *The Literary Griot: International Journal of Black Oral and Literary Studies*, 3, 2, 1991, p. 28.
- ¹⁰⁹ W. Carpenter, "'Ovals, Spheres, Ellipses, and Sundry Bulges"...', p. 88.
- ¹¹⁰ D. Schalkwyk, 'The Rules of Physiognomy...', pp. 82, 84.
- ¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.
- ¹¹² La Guma, *The Stone Country*, p. 16.
- ¹¹³ D. Schalkwyk, 'The Rules of Physiognomy', pp. 83-84.
- ¹¹⁴ La Guma, *The Stone Country*, p. 62.
- ¹¹⁵ La Guma, *The Stone Country*, p. 20; K. Balutansky, *The Novels of Alex La Guma*, p. 59. 59.
- ¹¹⁶ Balutansky, *The Novels of Alex La Guma*, p. 70.
- ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- ¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 63, 60.
- ¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- ¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 68; G. Moore, *Twelve African Writers*, p. 115.
- ¹²¹ Balutansky, *The Novels of Alex La Guma*, pp. 60, 72, 73.
- ¹²² D. Rabkin, 'Drum Magazine 1951-1961 and the works of Black South African Writers associated with it' (Leeds University, Ph.D. thesis, 1975), pp. 212-213.
- ¹²³ A. Roscoe, *Uhuru's Fire: African literature East to South*, p. 252.
- ¹²⁴ Correspondence, E. Mphahlele to La Guma, 28 May 1962, in the Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection; D.A. Miller, *Narrative and Its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1981), pp. 278-279.
- ¹²⁵ D. Brutus, 'African Thought', p. 3, pp. 3-6.
- ¹²⁶ B. la Guma interviews.
- ¹²⁷ *Cape Times*, 2 September 1964; *Cape Times*, 23 December 1964.
- ¹²⁸ Z. Bauman, 'Broken Lives, Broken Strategies', p. 72, in Z. Bauman, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1995), pp. 72-105.

- ¹²⁹ M. Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, p. 345.
- ¹³⁰ F. Meltzer, *Hot Property: The Stakes and Claims of Literary Originality* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994), p. 57.
- ¹³¹ La Guma, *The Stone Country*, pp. 12, 139.
- ¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 168.
- ¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 128.
- ¹³⁴ E.D. Vaughn, 'In Our Time and Picasso', in K. Rosen (ed), *Hemingway Repossessed* (Praeger, Westport, 1994), pp. 5-6.
- ¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 129, 140.
- ¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 144.
- ¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82.
- ¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- ¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 140-141.
- ¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 145.
- ¹⁴¹ J. Plath, 'Le Torero and "The Undefeated": Hemingway's Foray into Analytical Cubism', in K. Rosen (ed), *Hemingway Repossessed*, p. 10.
- ¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- ¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- ¹⁴⁴ Albie Sachs interview.
- ¹⁴⁵ La Guma, *The Stone Country*, pp. 119-120.
- ¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 39-41.
- ¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 29, 80ff.
- ¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 84, 127.
- ¹⁴⁹ R. Field, 'Art and the Man: Alex La Guma's Comics and Paintings', p. 57. *Critical Survey*, 11, 2, 1999, pp. 45-63.
- ¹⁵⁰ H. Barratt, 'South Africa's Dark Night: Metaphor and Symbol in La Guma's Fiction', p. 30.
- ¹⁵¹ La Guma, *The Stone Country*, pp. 33, 79.
- ¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- ¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- ¹⁵⁴ Albie Sachs interview, 11 December 2000.
- ¹⁵⁵ A. la Guma, *The Stone Country*, pp. 18; 25, 35, 59; 52; 12; 18.
- ¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 29, 168; 11.
- ¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- ¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 77.
- ¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.
- ¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 153.
- ¹⁶¹ La Guma, *A Walk in the Night*, p. 26.
- ¹⁶² T. Hermann, 'Formal Analogies in the Texts and Paintings of Ernest Hemingway and Paul Cezanne', in K. Rosen (ed.), *Hemingway Repossessed*, pp. 32-33.
- ¹⁶³ According to the *Oxford Companion to Art* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1975), there are two spellings of the artist's name. He spelled his name 'Brueghel' until 1599, and then dropped the 'h'; his two sons used the 'h'.
- ¹⁶⁴ Albie Sachs interview, 11 December 2000.
- ¹⁶⁵ L. Nkosi, 'Alex La Guma: The Man and His Work', p. 1.
- ¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- ¹⁶⁷ Albie Sachs interview, 11 December 2000.
- ¹⁶⁸ Alf Wannenburg interview; George Hallett/Roger Field interview, 2 April 1993; Andy Arendse/Roger Field interview, June 1999.
- ¹⁶⁹ Blanche la Guma/Roger Field interviews.
- ¹⁷⁰ Blanche la Guma interviews.
- ¹⁷¹ M. Horrell, *A Survey A Survey Relations in South Africa 1966*, p. 48.
- ¹⁷² Blanche la Guma interviews.
- ¹⁷³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

- ¹⁷⁵ D. Skinner, *Apartheid's Violent Legacy: A Report on Trauma in the Western Cape* (The Trauma Centre for Victims of Violence and Torture, Cape Town, 1997), p. 24; D. Foster, *Detention and Torture in South Africa*, p. 78.
- ¹⁷⁶ S. Carneson, quoted in L. Carneson-McGegror, *Homage to Hope*, p. 199.
- ¹⁷⁷ Blanche la Guma interviews.
- ¹⁷⁸ This part of my thesis draws on a paper presented at the 'Trauma and Topography' colloquium organised by the Landscape and Memory Project of the University of the Western Cape; the earlier version is available at uwc.ac.za/english/lamp. I wish to thank Garth Hamilton, the colloquium organisers and participants, and my colleagues at UWC for comments on earlier versions of this paper.
- ¹⁷⁹ D. Foster, *Detention and Torture in South Africa*, p. 4; D. Winnicott cited by J. Rutherford, *Men's Silences: Predicaments in Masculinity* (Routledge, London, 1992) p. 106; D. Skinner and L. Swartz, 'The Consequences for Preschool Children of a Parent's Detention: A Preliminary South African Clinical Study of Caregivers' Reports', *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 30, 2, p. 257 (243-259).
- ¹⁸⁰ J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1982), p. 160.
- ¹⁸¹ C. Harrison, 'The Effects of Landscape'. In W.J.T. Mitchell (ed.), *Landscape and Power* (University of Chicago Press, London, 1994), p. 204.
- ¹⁸² P. de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's reading of Rousseau', in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (University of Minneapolis Press, Minnesota, 1983) p. 108.
- ¹⁸³ C. Harrison, 'The Effects of Landscape', p. 226; emphasis in original.
- ¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 226, 216.
- ¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 220, 226.
- ¹⁸⁶ Blanche la Guma interviews.
- ¹⁸⁷ Among Brueghel's works which display landscape and religious qualities are *Landscape with Christ appearing to the Apostles at the Sea of Tiberias* (1553), *Landscape with the Parable of the Sower* (1557), *The Suicide of Saul* (1562), *The Flight into Egypt* (1563), *The Procession to Calvary* (1564), *The Conversion of Saul/The Conversion of St Paul* (1567).
- ¹⁸⁸ Correspondence Sadie Forman/RF 21 April 1993; Albie Sachs also remembers this painting.
- ¹⁸⁹ Alf Wannenburg/Roger Field interview, 22 May 1998.
- ¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹² F. Grossman, *Pieter Bruegel: Complete Edition of the Paintings* (Phaidon, London, 1973), pp. 48-9.
- ¹⁹³ W. Fleming, *Art and Ideas* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Fort Worth, 1991), p. 295.
- ¹⁹⁴ F. Grossman, p. 49.
- ¹⁹⁵ La Guma, *And a Threefold Cord*, p. 69. p. 69. -v La Guma, *The Stone Country*, p. 61.
- ¹⁹⁷ P. Stallybrass and A. White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London, Methuen, 1986), p. 183.
- ¹⁹⁸ F. Grossman, p. 49.
- ¹⁹⁹ P. Stallybrass and A. White, p. 193.
- ²⁰⁰ J. Rutherford, p. 106.
- ²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- ²⁰² S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* Vol. XVIII (Hogarth Press, London, 1955) p. 16 (emphasis in the original).
- ²⁰³ I. Craib, *Psychoanalysis and Social Theory* (Harvester, New York, 1989), p. 146.
- ²⁰⁴ M. Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, p. 345; F. Meltzer, *Hot Property: The Stakes and Claims of Literary Originality*, p. 57.
- ²⁰⁵ C. Harrison, 'The Effects of Landscape', pp. 226, 219-220.
- ²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 224.
- ²⁰⁷ H. Segal cited by A. Green, 'Projection', in *On Private Madness* (International Humanities Press, Madison, 1986), p. 89.
- ²⁰⁸ A. Green, 'Projection', pp. 85, 88.
- ²⁰⁹ M. Klein, 'Notes of Some Schizoid Mechanisms', in J. Mitchell (ed.), *The Selected Melanie Klein*, p. 186.

-
- ²¹⁰ M. Horrell, *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1966* (South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg, 1967), p. 78.
- ²¹¹ L. Carneson-McGregor, *Homage to Hope: South African Memories* (Aspen, London, 1996), p. 174; *Rand Daily Mail*, 13 January 1966; *Cape Argus*, 30 April 1966.
- ²¹² M. Horrell, *Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1966*, p. 78; State vs Fred Carneson, Cape Supreme Court Papers, National Archives Cape Town 1/1/1/744.
- ²¹³ Albie Sachs interview, 11 December 2000.
- ²¹⁴ Blanche la Guma interviews; see also D. Skinner and L. Swartz, 'The Consequences for Preschool Children of a Parent's Detention...': p. 249 on 'manifest separation fears'; p. 254 on 'a fear that the father would be detained again or hurt and that he, the child, was not in a position to control this'; p. 255 on the effect if 'the child remains at home and has to witness each time the security police come to look for the parent'.
- ²¹⁵ L. Carneson-McGregor, *Homage to Hope*, p. 180.
- ²¹⁶ D. Foster, *Detention and Torture in South Africa*, p. 24.
- ²¹⁷ R. September, 'Circular to Organisation' (South African Coloured Peoples Congress, London Committee, 20 October 1965), pp. 1-2, in Brian Bunting Papers.
- ²¹⁸ T. Lodge, *Black politics in South Africa since 1945*, pp. 310, 310-311.
- ²¹⁹ Reg September, 'draft of proposed pamphlet', 16 May 1966, p. 10, in Brian Bunting Papers.
- ²²⁰ Anon, 'Problems of the Congress Movement', n.d., p3, Brian Bunting Papers.
- ²²¹ See for example 'Memorandum dated June 1968 from the South African Coloured People's Congress' (Special Committee on the Policies of Apartheid of the Government of the Republic of South Africa (A/AC.115/L.229), United Nations, New York, 1968).
- ²²² Blanche la Guma interviews.
- ²²³ *Cape Argus*, 30 April 1966; *Sunday Times*, 5 June 1966.
- ²²⁴ Secretary of the Department of the Interior to J.A. la Guma 11 August 1966, in the Blanche and Alex la Guma Papers.
- ²²⁵ Blanche la Guma interviews.

How can you gather together
the thousand fragments
of each person?¹

Conclusion

Biography is a synthetic and self-reflexive genre. It constitutes the life of a subject by bringing together interpretations from diverse sources in pursuit of new insights. We achieve these insights by using theory as a form of metanarrative or metacommentary. In other words, we use theory to plot the narrative and to provide different forms of continuity between large or small moments in the narrative through which we represent the life. The idea that narrative and theory are inextricably linked has guided my story of La Guma's South African years. For me, theory is a form of narrative and all stories generate theoretical considerations. In this conclusion, therefore, I do not adopt a purely theoretical perspective. Instead I show that personal, theoretical, political and narratological considerations inevitably inform each other. This conclusion combines a synopsis of the biographical narrative with reflections on the theoretical issues that the story has raised. It demonstrates that telling and retelling stories and theorising about them are inseparable enterprises. I draw together and comment on the different strands of La Guma's South African years that I have explored, and reflect on the biographical mode.

Just as Blanche is far more than the wife of Alex la Guma, so Alex la Guma was much more than a politically committed writer. In this thesis I have examined his political work and thought, and the fiction, journalism, reviews, comics and paintings that he produced while in South Africa. To date, La Guma scholarship has paid relatively little attention to these other areas. I have attempted to chronicle and interpret La Guma's life and work fully and sympathetically. At the same time, I have tried to retain the capacity to criticise and reflect on what he did, wrote and said, and on how I, as a biographer, have rendered his sense of humour and his anger, his achievements and failures, his strengths and weaknesses, and his sense of

himself as a writer, political activist and artist. My thesis has shown what we can gain from a more comprehensive approach. It suggests a range of possibilities for research using a variety of perspectives.

Previous studies of La Guma have not explored his early life or the nature of his political thinking in sufficient detail. They have tended to preface their studies with short descriptions of his life and politics – often taking his pronouncements on literature and culture at face value – before moving on to what they see as the important material – his fiction. I have found that a more detailed study of his life and politics is a necessary condition for an analysis of all the genres and media in which he worked. Turning Lenin on his head in a way that I believe La Guma would recognise, I have sought to move the study of La Guma two steps forward by first taking one step backward.² The process of drawing the past into the present in order to move forward is a theme in La Guma's work, and a methodological *leitmotiv* of this thesis.

My two main theoretical debts in this project have been psychoanalysis and Marxism. The psychoanalytic theory on which I have drawn assumes that the subject as an index of individuality exists but that it is not a fixed, unchanging entity. Nor has the influence of postmodernism on Marxism and psychoanalysis led me to replace what Marike Finlay describes as the 'deontologization of subject' with the 'ontologization of discourse'.³ Historical and dialectical materialism played a large part in forming La Guma's interpretations of South African history, politics, economy and art. They have also been significant in the development of my own thinking. I have criticised what I regard as simplistic, teleological Marxist analyses of La Guma's work and life, and have tried to remain aware of the way in which the analytic categories deployed have determined La Guma's interpretations, my interpretations and the interpretations of the critics whose work I have consulted. I have found the common ground between Marxism and psychoanalysis in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'. By claiming that previous studies have ignored the significance of La Guma's early years and by criticising earlier simplistic Marxist

analyses, I have found myself 'staging the disappearance and return of the object within [my] reach'.⁴

Biography has as its object the subject, and it constitutes historically specific subjectivities. None of the raw material with which it works is value- or interpretation-free. In biographical and historical research and writing, every source carries with it an interpretation 'in which the expression is indistinguishable from the thing expressed'. This applies equally to primary and secondary material – a distinction in the sources of knowledge and information which this thesis has implicitly questioned – and to the theoretical frameworks through which we establish narratives.⁵

All biographies make truth claims about their subject(s). In a postmodern age they may make an additional claim about the nature of that truth itself – that there is an arbitrary and open-ended quality to the authority with which they present their story of a life.⁶ Nevertheless, even in a post-modern age an ending of sorts is necessary. Personal reflections offer one way out of the conflict between the impossibility of closure and the need for a conclusion. This experience of conflict emerges when we try to incorporate into the limitations imposed by our theoretical and narrative frameworks the acknowledgement that 'play time' is infinite and that, at best, self-reflection can only install the semblance of a coherent subjectivity. Another option would have been to halt the story by introducing material 'from a world untouched by the conditions of narratability'.⁷ In a biography of La Guma's whole life, death might have provided this resolution, but it was not available to me. Nor could La Guma's 'breakdown' and exile have fulfilled this function. While still in South Africa, it was possible for him to narrate his own breakdown, for his copy of Brueghel's *The Conversion* placed before him his own experience of breaking down in a form that he could not comprehend. 'The experience of the object,' as Bollas puts it, 'precedes the knowing of the object.' Thus, the 'object casts its shadow on the subject'.⁸

However, there is another sense in which exile provided material that could not be narrated. Between La Guma's exile and the 1994 elections lie my own years of

exile. Not as long or as intense in their commitment to the liberation struggle as La Guma's, they represent the point beyond which my narrative of La Guma's life cannot yet proceed. The decision to confine my thesis to his South African years is in part a symptom of my desire to find a place for myself here and now – there can never be a return – by constituting moments from a place and time that is familiar but which I do not know.

My thoughts on the process by which I have constituted moments from that time and place return me to the significance of theory – that mirage of a home outside time and place – in biography. One of the most widely read and marketable of literary and historical genres, biography to date has received relatively little academic attention. At a time when boundaries between disciplines are breaking down and new specialisms are emerging, biography demonstrates the value and pleasures of storytelling and interdisciplinary research.

* * *

My thesis begins with significant events in the life of Jimmy la Guma. These provide the political and psychological context in which his son would grow up. I use psychoanalytic theories and models, particularly those provided by Freud and Klein, to reconstruct Alex la Guma's early childhood in the context of wider political developments as they affected his family. The concepts of symbolic equation and symbolism proper offered an interpretive framework within which to place notions of representation, narrative, lack, difference and gender.

The measure of Wilhelmina's success as a mother was her subsequent invisibility to her son and to those critics who saw La Guma as the son of his father. For La Guma narrative had a performative dimension. He grew up in District Six, where code-switching was widespread. In code-switching, the social context determines which language form a speaker deploys at a particular moment. Of necessity, its sensitivity to audience expectation implies that the speaker is aware of the performative aspects of language-use and narrative. Most studies of La Guma

ignore his mother. He attributed to her several factors that contributed to his development as a writer and political activist. These factors include the expression of political virtue under the farseeing gaze of Lenin, and the ability to accommodate experiences of loss and separation to which she had contributed and which she had then explained. Two roughly contemporaneous events precipitated this sense of loss and separation: the experiences of racism at the circus and the birth of his younger sister. In both cases he was turned away from something, both accompanied his participation in a larger world, and both contributed to the resolution of Oedipal relations within his family. This experience of lack was the basis for what La Guma himself later described as the ability to tell stories and hold the attention of his peers at will. It also explains why the story-within-the story occurs so often in his fiction. This device enabled La Guma to overcome temporarily the experience of being turned away from.

My exploration of the 'lore of the mother' – a less hierarchical source of storytelling than the 'law of the father' – has several implications for this thesis. Firstly, by proposing a different set of sources and emphases, it shows that if beginnings are not necessarily fictions they are almost always arbitrary. Secondly, the juxtaposition of 'law' and the 'lore' questions the idea of a rigid distinction between a public, social exterior and a private, personal interior implicit in most studies of La Guma. These tend to concentrate on the former. Here my aim has been to show that La Guma was like all of us – a complex mix of public and private stories. Thirdly, it highlights the fact that if the psychoanalytic interpretations on which I rely assume that certain stages or moments are 'retrospective constructions' of memory and phantasy, then my use of a linear chronology to tell La Guma's life story is a choice of one narrative device among many possible ways of constituting a biographical subject. Thirdly, it shows that there can never be a reliable or predictable distinction between 'fact', 'interpretation' and 'fiction'. As I have argued above, theory has both analytic and narrative functions in what La Guma wrote about himself and in what I have written about La Guma. Fourthly, it exposes the

irony that I can only question the 'law of the father' and invoke the 'lore of the mother' by turning psychoanalysis against its own father.

An infant crying at separation from a mother who has been prevented from making a public appearance that the father then takes up; that infant's 'first recollection of life' – an alleyway filled with 'overflowing dustbins' and 'stagnant water'; a boy who could not see the circus performers because they faced that part of the audience reserved for whites, and who learned about the significance and insignificance of the difference between 'European' and 'non-European' from his mother. From an incident recalled by parents to direct perceptions of poverty, to awareness of race and exclusion – these three incidents in the early life of Alex la Guma provide emblematic and narratable moments through which he established his gender, class and racial identities. This confirms the idea that 'all tales may lead us back not so much to events as to other tales', to autobiography and to the constitution of the subject as 'a structure of the fictions' one tells about oneself.⁹ In the early part of my thesis I contextualise, interpret and explore the conditions out of which these pieces emerge while acknowledging their fictional qualities and the contribution these fictional qualities play in the foundation of my own story about La Guma.

The sequence of symbolic equations induced by the anxiety of separation from his mother is the basis for La Guma's first story about his own desire to tell stories, and for his need to repeat them. In that story of separation and crying, La Guma shows that he and his father were responsible for her silence. That story created the conditions for Jimmy's absences *and* his father's voice. The Lenin story found in 'The picture in the parlour' confirmed these gender and political positions. Transposed onto its hidden accompaniment – the birth of La Guma's sister – the circus scene shows that awareness of the negative qualities associated with ideas of racial inferiority could be productive – but only on condition that he became a 'follower of Lenin'. Similarly, the circus scene became productive when he accommodated and transformed the experience of being-turned-away-from by converting narrative into a performative and, ultimately, political act.¹⁰ When he

was under house arrest he underwent experiences of disempowerment and loss again. Here, as my analysis of *The Stone Country* indicates, the linear quality of textual narrative was inadequate, and painting became his way of representing and hiding himself in another story whose elements existed simultaneously.

In comparison with his childhood, La Guma describes his adolescence and early adulthood with clarity. This is a common feature of autobiography. Nevertheless, there are problems with his accounts of this period. In particular, there is a considerable difference between the way his school contemporaries saw him and the way in which he saw himself. There are at least two reasons for this. Firstly, we do not know the precise age to which he refers. Secondly, he mentions books that were published several years after his school days. We can say that his readings of London and Tressell – writers whose work he says shaped his world view – occurred any time between 1941 and 1945, i.e. between the ages of 16 and 20.

We cannot assume that as a worker or part-time student he would have visited the homes of working-class people any more than he did as a schoolboy. He only refers to public spaces and thresholds, beyond which lay 'a dark cavern full of smells',¹¹ In La Guma's autobiographical work, historical and dialectical materialism mediates the division between domestic and private spheres. When he 'saw in' *The Ragged Trouser Philanthropists* 'our own working men', he did not cross the domestic threshold physically and literally but through the literary and political framework that Tressell and London provided. By 'seeing in', La Guma transformed the objects of his disgust, curiosity and political knowledge into 'objects within his reach'.¹² Here I argue that for La Guma, as I argue for myself in the Introduction, politicised literature can provide knowledge of circumstances to which one has no direct access, and that writing in its various forms can place the reader in those scenes because it transports the reader beyond the threshold.

In newspaper debates to which his father contributed during the late 1930s fiction by coloured writers was seen as an index of cultural maturity, especially when compared to the literature produced by African-Americans and that produced by and

for Africans in South Africa. This interest is echoed in distorted form in the bar-room discussion found in *A Walk in the Night*.

La Guma's earliest recorded drawings in *The Liberator* – a publication that contained material by figures associated with the Harlem Renaissance and his father – were part of this quest for political liberation and cultural recognition. La Guma's autobiographical texts indicate that by the late 1930s he saw himself in political and class rather than racial terms, and that by the mid to late 1940s he had become what his audience perceived him to be. At this stage, commitment to socialism was as much a function of others' perceptions as it was of his own beliefs. His political move forward 'in the manner of a communist' was also a return to the performance of narratives, though by now they had acquired an explanatory and analytic dimension.

La Guma's non-political activities had significant emotional, political and literary consequences. They led to membership of the Young Communist League, the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) and the South African Coloured Peoples Organisation (SACPO). Party membership also served as a 're-introduction' to Blanche Herman, his future wife. The need to support his wife and the child they were expecting was one of the reasons why he gave up full-time political work and moved to *New Age*, where he received a small salary.

After the dissolution of the CPSA in 1950, much of La Guma's political attention turned to SACPO. He was involved in its campaigns around the Freedom Charter and the effects of apartheid legislation on coloureds. In opposition to the argument that coloured identity was purely an apartheid construct, La Guma was adamant that coloureds were an identifiable national group. He acknowledged that apartheid had contributed to and inhibited the formation and development of this identity and that it had no essential or intrinsic features. The definition of coloured identity was a function of power relations, because participation in the struggle for freedom by coloureds as a national group would provide a more satisfactory basis for that identity. Mobilisation for, and organisation of, the Congress of the People in 1955 and the 1958 general election confronted SACPO and La Guma with the

question of coloured identity and its problematic relationship to the apartheid legislation that had helped to shape it. This in turn required that the Congress Alliance revisit the National Question. Two approaches are evident in La Guma's writing on coloured identity. One, general and theoretical, is rooted in the discourse of national liberation and seeks to place coloureds in an incomplete historical narrative. The other, more pragmatic, tries to respond to specific situations and the particularities of coloured identity perceived as a 'historically constituted' 'intermixture' of diverse interests. SACPO also had to acknowledge that it did not always prioritise problems in the same way as its potential constituency. The 'big' problems of national oppression and economic exploitation coexisted with many 'smaller' problems and issues, such as the 'big days' of the Carnival, which were equally important for its constituency. What SACPO could not reconcile in the political arena, he tried to resolve in his literature. This does not mean that we can reduce his fiction to a drive to solve this problem.

SACPO's move from an initial position of total boycott to one of strategic participation required the organisation to situate itself in relation to a number of political actors such as the NEUM, the UP and the NP. La Guma's unpublished criticisms of George Peake appear to be his clearest assertion at this time that coloured identity could only be conceptualised and developed within the terms provided by the Freedom Charter and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's perceived resolution of the National Question. This does not mean, however, that the terms within which he framed coloured identity were responsible for SACPO's poor electoral results.

La Guma approached the question of coloured identity through a story of origins. He repeated this story on several occasions. His originary tale was genealogical and historical-materialist. Coloureds were an 'intermixture' of the 'colonisers and the colonised and subjugated peoples from southern Africa and other Dutch colonies'; they emerged from 'the intermixture of white people with Hottentots, Javanese, Malay and African slaves'. Politically, the emancipation of slaves in the nineteenth century had not made a substantial difference to their social

and economic position. For SACPO and La Guma in the present of the 1950s and 1960s, diversity characterised this constituency. The 'Coloured community', he wrote, had 'within itself larger numbers of smaller organisations', and had 'not been able to develop fully any definite culture or customs and other conditions which go to constitute a fully fledged nationality'.

This community had a recognisable place in South African society, but could not be defined because its real and true national identity would only emerge with the completion of the liberation struggle and the resolution of the National Question. For La Guma, as against the NEUM, coloureds were not a 'so-called' national group, yet for him this group lacked 'the defining characteristics of other national groups'.¹³ In the period that this thesis covers, La Guma wrote relatively little about other national groups. What he wrote in his articles on Wilton Mkwayi, the Langa riots and coloured responses to the state of emergency suggests that he attributed to Africans a fuller and more coherent identity and political presence than he saw in coloureds at this time. He viewed coloured identity as incomplete and as an 'intermixture' to which he was committed in the knowledge that it had not yet achieved its potential. This potential would develop further through the national liberation struggle. For La Guma, coloured identity was not 'other' and 'not-yet-self'.¹⁴

Participation in the elections required the mobilisation of coloureds as a specific national group. This would have precluded co-operation with organisations such as the NEUM for whom any participation in apartheid structures was unacceptable. Before and after the election, La Guma singled out these purveyors of 'theory' as the chief enemy. He was not entirely correct in his criticism of their view that heightened social, economic and political contradictions create widespread misery, which in turn would increase political resistance. The success of the anti-Republic Day stay-at-home indicated that widespread boycott action on a single issue under conditions of greater repression could succeed.

Between the late 1940s and late 1950s, La Guma was more concerned with politics than with writing. Later his literary output increased, but his concern with

political issues did not diminish. The degree to which popular culture attracted and influenced La Guma became clear when he turned to journalism and fiction. Many currents affected his working life as a journalist, writer, and political activist. While his politics and ideas about coloured identity were based on developments in the Soviet Union, he was greatly influenced by American popular culture from the 1930s to the 1960s. He combined this with revolutionary and democratic currents in earlier and contemporary American political thought.

* * *

Dramatic events accompanied the start of the Treason Trial. From the start of the trial, La Guma saw in the sense of community that developed among the trialists and the Defence Fund the beginnings of a new nation. His ideas about a new nation did not contradict his views on the National Question. Rather, these ideas capitalised on the irony that after attempting to separate South Africans, the apartheid state had brought together its opponents. Founded on mutual support and mutual obligation in times of need, this new nation embodied the ideas expressed in the Donne epigraph from *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. This was an early public expression of Hemingway's influence. It would reappear in speeches, short stories and in his last published works.

Despite political restrictions, La Guma remained politically active. During this period he led a peripatetic life, moving between Johannesburg, Pretoria – that 'suburb of the Voortrekker Monument' – and Cape Town, where his family had remained. Blanche's midwifery practice was the family's main source of income. Later it would provide material for his fiction. He sketched fellow Trialists and later produced his comic strip. *Little Libby: The Adventures of Liberation Chabalala* drew on his love of writing and drawing. It united his skills in two media that, from then onwards, would largely follow different paths and accommodate increasingly different experiences. The two notable exceptions to this tendency – his descriptions of the emotional crises experienced by Adonis and Gus – confirm his interest in and

ambivalence towards modernism and modernist techniques. They show that under some circumstances – as artist or imaginary viewer – La Guma could and did conceptualise situations in which a work of art had no external referent, thereby throwing doubt on the widely held view that he was committed only to committed art. However, we cannot say that La Guma self-consciously used aspects of modernist painting or writing to undermine his reader's view of the world.¹⁵ As my analysis of 'The Lemon Orchard' and 'Coffee for the Road' demonstrates, when he used the techniques associated with Hemingway he returned to the more familiar terrain of realism, leaving us with a complex and fluid combinations of aesthetic, epistemological, political and ontological positions.

The comic story met La Guma's nostalgic need for an unmediated form of communication in the modern world. The comic strip drew on cinematic conventions and was a popular medium of communication – in both senses. The story relied on and consolidated the Americanisation of urban African and coloured experience which *Drum* magazine had popularised and mythologised. This Americanisation of urban experience also occurs in his descriptions of the people and environment of District Six in *A Walk in the Night*. However, La Guma did not rely solely on existing myths and images. He had already established his own 'bank' of images. It was the capacity to play with and bend a formula – sometimes drawn from others and sometimes of his own making – that made his comic story a success and enabled him to express his sense of humour. This tendency to combine his own work with that of others would be evident in the longer prose fiction that followed.

The comic's political concerns were an index of this nomadic life, a reflection of the Congress Alliance's national and regional concerns and campaigns, and an assertion that in the national liberation struggle issues affecting the African majority were paramount. The way in which La Guma incorporated these concerns as pictures within pictures or by modifying historical settings was both disarming and politicising. At the same time they were another example of the story-within-the-story.

By the late 1950s – two years before the publication of *A Walk in the Night* – La Guma was adept at characterisation, dialogue and setting, but could not yet produce longer fiction with sustained plots. The comic was not an artistic aberration. What we find there in graphic form reappears in textual form elsewhere. It provides us with insights into the evolution of his interests and abilities, and his narrative strategies and representational styles at this time. Nor was *Liberation Chabalala* an isolated moment of political deviance from La Guma's more widely known persona as serious writer and activist. Like 'Up My Alley', the comic strip indicates that a more subversive and anti-authoritarian La Guma existed alongside the serious persona associated with his longer prose fiction in South Africa and in exile. The late 1950s and early 1960s saw La Guma's emergence as a full-time writer. At this time the National Party was defining racial categories and implementing policies which made 'passing for white' increasingly difficult. The early short stories indicate that he was concerned about a coloured identity fixated with degrees of 'whiteness' and 'blackness'. For La Guma, the problem was not being coloured or whether coloureds existed as a national group, but how to disentangle coloured identity from colour prejudice and apartheid legislation.

La Guma produced idealised representations of Africans in his writings on the Treason Trial, but he also used the same stylistic devices for satirical purposes. In the case of Africans he used a prose style that was 'noble' in its praise of Mkwazi but drew on satire, irony and bathos for its description of 'die Kaffir Koning'. In the case of coloureds, he relied on puns and code-switching to evoke Cape Vernacular Afrikaans (CVA) and to affirm the authenticity of those on whose behalf he spoke. In both cases, the utterances were embedded in or surrounded by commentary in Standard English. Here he may have been influenced by Tressell, who used standard and non-standard orthographies to distinguish those who knew what they were talking about from those who did not.¹⁶ The political difficulties and problems associated with this form of representation were evident in the way in which he imposed consensus on the 'dead-end kids' of Hanover Street in his article on unemployment and the colour bar.

We must balance the criticism that La Guma typecast a section of the Cape's population against his use and evocation of CVA for anti-authoritarian and anti-apartheid purposes. In District Six, where La Guma grew up and lived until his early twenties, there was a rich tradition of wordplay and punning, and much of it was directed at figures of authority. This tradition is evident in La Guma's journalism and fiction. His reviews indicate that he was aware of the implications of 'politically incorrect' language use and that he made conscious and informed choices about code switching. Nor did he confine his punning to CVA, for he produced several topical examples in Standard English. It is reasonable to assume that the impulse behind these evocations was democratic. He sought to speak for the people and used CVA to unmask and undermine the oppressor. Thus La Guma operated with a dual notion of the working class. There was the working class observed in an anthropological manner for an outside audience, and there was the working class as a 'class and politically conscious people' with whom he identified and for whom SACPO sought to provide political leadership. At the same time, his prison journalism and fiction articulated a desire for downward political identification so that the working class and lumpen proletariat could ultimately move upwards and a personal fear of degeneration. La Guma's journalism and fiction at this time also indicate that he believed in 'forward' cultural evolution and 'backward' degeneration and that he combined these beliefs with monogenism and polygenism. There is no indication that he adopted these beliefs by reading works that set out these ideas in purely theoretical terms. It is more likely that he absorbed them through works by London or Scott.

La Guma's reviews indicate that as early as the 1950s he was thinking about the relationship between art, politics and social structure in his fiction, while his articles on conditions in Roeland Street jail indicate that his journalism influenced his fiction. La Guma may have written reviews in the 1960s, by which time his work indicated a greater openness to post-realist techniques. Should they come to light, they might indicate a different set of concerns. Given the frequency of the story-within-the-story in *The Stone Country* we can assume that a concern for the narrator's or

performer's relationship to the audience would have remained important. The reviews that I have found were written ten years before he went into exile and twenty years before his speech on 'Culture and Liberation' – a statement on committed art on which so many La Guma scholars have relied to infer his aesthetic.¹⁷ Instead, I have argued that there was a dynamic and fluid relationship between his journalism, fiction and art, though within limits. His political views and his ideas about the effects of environment on individual behaviour found in a work such as 'Out of Darkness' were among the limiting factors. He also ventured beyond realism, but almost inevitably returned to the more familiar terrain of realism.

* * *

In his 1947 letter to the *Cape Standard*, La Guma had criticised capitalism and supported a deterministic and 'scientific' form of socialism. Some ten years later he had added a moral dimension. Like all moral outlooks, La Guma's was closely bound up with his sense of humour. He saw the funny and tragic aspects of the Immorality Act. Several of La Guma's early short stories dealt with this topic. They found favour with the editors of *Black Orpheus* – not because of their subject matter but because they were stark stories about individuals in a dysfunctional society. Beier and Mphahlele helped to launch La Guma's literary career by publishing *A Walk in the Night*. Its reception at the 1962 Kampala conference on African literature made it one of the most frequently prescribed South African novels at the continent's anglophone universities.

These early short stories suggest that while at times La Guma regarded racial distinctions – for instance between white and coloured – as arbitrary, he saw coloureds as an identifiable group. They also indicate that in South Africa both colour blindness and colour consciousness could lead to tragedy – confirmation that South Africa was indeed a dysfunctional society.

Oppression, in the short stories, was not only racial and political. There was also the masculine gaze of La Guma's narrator. Democratic impulses may have

guided La Guma's evocation of CVA but this did not automatically make the gaze of the narrator and 'the men' an agent of change. Just as we found with code switching in his journalism, La Guma's fiction could produce a combination of problematic and critical observations. This gaze was a symptom of La Guma's ability to recognise the experience of marginality and his unwillingness or inability to acknowledge its social, political and gender implications.

As a target, literally, of the apartheid state, La Guma had no cause to feel marginal. He continued to write for *New Age* and used his high political profile to reaffirm the CPC's position that coloureds should see themselves as part of the national liberation and anti-colonial movements. As a result, the apartheid state regarded him as a threat. He was shot at twice, detained without trial several times, and on at least one occasion was the victim of a disinformation campaign. There is no evidence to suggest that in the months prior to his banning La Guma consciously turned to indirect literary and political devices such as satire, irony and puns to attack his opponents. Where more direct options were available, he exploited them fully. By virtue of their stress on 'news', the 'Pampoen' pieces confirmed his commitment to, rather than departure from, documentary styles of narration. His documentation of observed or experienced realities was mediated by fictional texts. We should also view with caution claims that he went beyond a media-constructed reality. All newspapers produce a media-constructed reality. In the 'Pampoen' pieces La Guma attempted to subvert one media-constructed reality by satirising the idea of 'news' itself. La Guma began his 'Up My Alley' column during the Treason Trial, and its first and last columns contained the same quotation from Tom Paine. This form of closure was a gesture of defiance. It was an assertion that the struggle would continue, for the state's attempt to silence him presaged his most creative period.

Early reviews of *A Walk in the Night* praised its literary achievements, its veracity based on La Guma's familiarity with District Six, and his empathy with its inhabitants. The novella contains many images of death, disease, degeneration, decay and downward adaptation. The novella's exploration of coloured racism and

political consciousness – franker than many of his political pieces – is complemented by the incompleteness experienced by many of its characters. This incompleteness is a source of frustration and, as the references to *Hamlet* suggest, a reminder that decisive and collective political action by coloureds within the liberation movement would give them their place in the sun.

La Guma based his novella on memories dating back to the 1940s – the period in which he read Jack London's *People of the Abyss*. These factors contributed to the sense of both familiarity and disgust at the novella's setting. His novella also shares so many features with the 1954 *Drum* three-hander by Rive, Clarke and Matthews that it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the three-hander was an important source which he felt unable or unwilling to disclose. This was also a feature of his thoughts on his next long work. Here, just as we found in the case of *Pampoen-onder-die-Bos* and in relation to *Liberation Chabalala*, La Guma went back to an earlier form in order to move forward. His creative process was characterised by a series of returns that enabled him to go beyond, and a tendency to minimise or obscure his debts to other fictional works.

While some painterly images in *A Walk in the Night* indicate La Guma's interest in modernism, others evoke disorder and carelessness, and contribute to a sense of decay in District Six. The cowboy and gangster fantasies of his characters – like the 'dead-end kids' in his journalism – demonstrate the limits of their world and the almost insuperable obstacles they face in escaping from it. La Guma describes the emotions of some of his characters as if he is watching them while they are watching a film. This additional layer of narrative self-consciousness is a double form of voyeurism, for they are unaware that he is watching them while they watch the actions of others.

In La Guma's journalism and fiction the official guardians of apartheid are often portrayed as machines. They can think, but they have no emotions. In *A Walk in the Night* those who question or oppose this system either cannot understand each other or face huge obstacles. Those who offer a political alternative are too marginal to make any impact. They can feel, but they cannot think clearly. In this work the only

immediate threat to the apartheid system comes from the crowd. The images La Guma uses to describe it suggest that he is ambivalent about its potential. It represents a vital force, yet it has qualities that might have come from the oppressor. La Guma attempts to resolve this tension by shifting to more individualised characters in whom he unites real and symbolic features. The novella has a more sophisticated and complex conclusion than the comic does, but if we measure political progress by indicators of collective action then *A Walk in the Night* represents a step backward. Even if we assume that the comic is ironic in places, it has more in common with *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*. If La Guma's longer fiction depicts increasing levels of political consciousness and organisation, they are not present at this stage.

* * *

And a Threefold Cord shows signs that it was written by someone denied access to other people. La Guma was quite specific about how he wanted others to interpret it. This concern may explain why he was reluctant to acknowledge his debt to Steinbeck. Acknowledging that debt would have undermined claims that the novel was based on journalistic observation, contradicted ideas of individual and original creativity to which he subscribed, and called into question his commitment to a developmental literary model that culminated in socialist realism. La Guma's reluctance to acknowledge Steinbeck is also significant for my exploration of the porous boundaries between biography and autobiography. His reluctance suggests that from the early 1960s La Guma had been unconsciously constructing his autobiography, and that what he wrote about himself was in part a function of the way in which he wanted others to see him as a writer. In *The Biographer's Tale*, A.S. Byatt's post-modern satire about a doctoral candidate who becomes disillusioned with post-structuralism and decides to write a biography, her main protagonist states that 'what we may charitably call the *distortions of fact* were his own, and are thus in themselves biographical facts'. Shortly after this, her

protagonist despairs of ever finding 'a style *of my own*, entirely freed from post-post-structuralist clutter'.¹⁸

La Guma's journalistic modification of Steinbeck's intercalary technique – a significant feature of *The Grapes of Wrath* – shows that he had also found his own style. Among his other influences were a particular genre of news articles on Windermere that appeared in the *Cape Standard*, *The Guardian* and *New Age* between the 1940s and the 1960s. Blanche la Guma's experiences as a midwife also contributed details of the interiors of some of the shacks. He also drew on his own experiences of loss and mourning. Consequently, his responses to death in this novel differ from his responses to this topic in his other work.

La Guma wrote *And a Threefold Cord* to influence people who were living outside South Africa. Here he shares the authorial intentions of Steinbeck, who did not write *The Grapes of Wrath* to mobilise the migrant communities represented by the Joad family but to influence wider opinion and sentiment. This does not explain fully why La Guma, like Steinbeck, wrote a work that proposes collectivist solutions to the problems of false consciousness, inequality and exploitation but ends on a note of personal and emotional fulfilment, and that affirms the family over society. Part of the answer lies in his investment in *The Grapes of Wrath* and in what 'On a Wedding Day' indicates he chose to exclude. What he chose to exclude suggests that he knew the limits of his narrative abilities.

La Guma used the short passage about birds from the beginning of *The Grapes of Wrath* to close his second and fifth novels. This passage in Steinbeck represents the search for higher or more advanced forms of thought and life. Later La Guma stated that his novels represented 'the developing sense of revolt which was fermenting all the time within the [South African] communities'.¹⁹ His novels do not represent this revolt in a linear teleological manner. There are progressive elements but they exist in tandem with more problematic aspects. Freda's primitive agony precipitates changes in Charlie's choice of emotional and political objects and affirms his altruism. Simultaneously, it indicates that for La Guma the goal of upward political identification intrinsic to the formation of a class-conscious

proletariat had to contend with the fears of regression and downward adaptation found in *fin de siècle* literature. I highlight this fear by using psychoanalytic theory – another *fin de siècle* body of knowledge equally reliant upon metaphors of the primitive, and of anthropological and archaeological discovery – but one which in this instance complements and interrogates the former. The result is a reading that explores the underlying tensions in La Guma's work while acknowledging the potential for political and personal growth that both bodies of knowledge can offer.

La Guma owed more to Steinbeck than he was willing or able to admit. Chandramohan's and Mkhize's view that Gorky influenced La Guma comes from the writer himself. I too derive my argument about Steinbeck from La Guma – by interpreting the latter through psychoanalytic categories more attuned to ambivalences and half denials. The argument for Steinbeck does not invalidate their claim. Under most circumstances one cannot disprove the influence of one writer on another. One can only make what one believes is an alternative case for the greater importance of another influence. This has methodological, critical and political implications. If we read La Guma symptomatically or 'against the grain' we can generate new perspectives on a writer whose work it is easy to dismiss in a period characterised by cynicism towards the socialist project, the eclipse of Marxist literary criticism and the concomitant lack of interest in 'struggle literature'. The reading proposed here makes two suggestions. Firstly, La Guma's work is a more complex combination of literary, personal and political factors than most critics have so far acknowledged. Secondly, those who argue for a political progression from novel to novel should take into consideration the paradoxes, internal contradictions, subtexts and movements forwards and backwards in each work. There is no incompatibility between claiming La Guma for a socialist project and in rejecting the idea that the sequence of his novels represents 'a vision of art reaching out towards its own immanent *telos*'.²⁰ This applies equally to his modes of writing. We can no more say that his main protagonists moved smoothly from inchoate anger to progressive political consciousness than we can say that he moved from realism and naturalism to a fully-fledged modernism.

There is something incongruous about citing Borges, with his *hidalgo* image, in a discussion of La Guma, yet he has much to offer. Borges notes that literary scholars in search of influences tend to enumerate sources that must share features with the text they are presumed to have influenced. Of more significance is the way in which these possible sources differ from each other, for it is in that elusive realm of negatives, absences and spaces that a writer's 'idiosyncrasy' or individuality lies.²¹ Only a narrow and territorial approach seeks to limit La Guma's influences to a single writer or to a particular literary or political school. There is no incompatibility between claiming La Guma for a socialist project and arguing that he was influenced by a variety of sometimes contradictory sources.

* * *

During his last five years in South Africa, La Guma wrote under increasingly difficult personal and political conditions. Once banned and placed under house arrest, he had no access to the sort of material that could have made *Jimmy la Guma: A biography* a more thorough and authoritative work. Despite its unfinished state – we should regard it as an early draft – it remains a valuable text. As the life story of an activist written by his novelist and activist son, *Jimmy* is the discursive and narratological point at which a number of factors converge. On father-son relations, the biography indicates that both operated within the same political tradition and that Jimmy influenced his son's views on matters such as the Independent Native Republic thesis, coloured identity, the two-stage theory, and the importance of broad-front politics. However, La Guma also implies that he was different from his father.

Jimmy liked to tell stories about his experiences and exploits. These may have developed his son's ear for a good story. The main focus of the biography is on the continuities between father and son. La Guma's later statement that his 'father had a great deal to do with moulding [his] philosophical and political outlook and guiding [him] towards the reading of serious works, both political and literary' finds early

expression here.²² So too does the oral communication earlier encapsulated in the lore of the mother.

La Guma had given up the idea of writing a history of coloured politics, but this does not mean that he had given up thinking historically or that his interest in the project had diminished. *Jimmy* is the point at which his ideas about history and historical change, and the structure of narrative and awareness of determinism at this stage converge. He argued that Jimmy consciously used Marxist principles to guide his decisions, but did not explore the factors that influenced his father to think or act in particular ways. The result is a narrative that assumes a historical determinism from which its central character, who at times acquires picaresque qualities, is exempt while the subsidiary characters are not. Of necessity, related genres such as biography, the picaresque novel and the *bildungsroman* continually negotiate the balance between the need to show how ordinary and how different their subjects are. Here *Jimmy* has more in common with *And a Threefold Cord* and *The Stone Country*, which contrast determinism and the 'capacity for advanced thought', than with *A Walk in the Night*, which stresses environmental and social determinism and incorporates political opposition through diffuse or marginal characters.

Biography, conventionally a realist and empirical genre, enabled La Guma to experiment with non-linear forms of narrative. After *A Walk in the Night*, he started to shift away from linear chronologies. La Guma's interest in and experiments with modernism are an index of his awareness of time and memory, though we should not forget that the conditions under which he wrote also contributed to the use of non-linear chronologies and multivocal narratives. The last short stories he wrote in South Africa and the beginnings of *And a Threefold Cord* and *Jimmy* support this claim. Like *The Stone Country*, *Jimmy* begins at a point in the story where the action is already well under way. In other respects it has more in common with *A Walk in the Night* and *And a Threefold Cord*. After the beginning it retains a linear and chronological narrative and does not break up the order of events, as would *The Stone Country*, *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* and *Time of the Butcherbird*.

There was an overlap in the political careers of father and son. This is why *Jimmy* shifts between biography and autobiography. La Guma interprets developments towards the end of the work as direct forerunners of events in which he would later participate. This leads him to equate the history of their political activities with the history of coloured politics and to provide a retrospective justification for his own and SACPO's participation in the 1958 general election. In addition, the way in which he writes about his father's reasons for becoming politically involved prefigures ways in which he would write later about his own reasons for joining the CPSA. Thus *Jimmy* confirms the observations on masculinity made in the first two chapters – that it is a function of a positional rather than a personal identification with the father. This is evident from the way in which La Guma treats the obituary of the Party and the obituary of his father as concurrent narratives, and from the way in which the biography and his own later autobiographical pieces subsume father and son under the same law and pays relatively little attention to Wilhelmina's contribution.

The '*Quartet* sessions' provide us with insight into the left wing literary life of Cape Town in the 1960s. They also show how restrictions limited La Guma's contact with other political and literary figures and gave him the opportunity to write. La Guma wrote in the knowledge that whatever he had created could be removed at a moment's notice. His experiments with modernism coincided with increasing oppression, though oppression did not necessarily cause him to experiment in this way.

There are several reasons why the critical literature on La Guma has not accommodated the idea that he was drawn to modernism in its metropolitan or postcolonial forms. These include the views that La Guma was a critical or social realist, that he rejected 'art for art's sake', and that he did not produce his work under postcolonial conditions. At a methodological level the Lukácsian basis of much La Guma criticism has excluded this genre from consideration. La Guma was influenced by Hemingway's attempt to reconcile modernism and realism. By contrast, the idea that naturalist forms of writing influenced La Guma has found

greater acceptance, and we can see the influence of naturalism in La Guma's inability to explore his characters' experiences of time and memory without using a device such as delirium induced by trauma.

* * *

During the early to middle 1960s, the liberation movement was on the defensive. Having introduced the legislation that defined apartheid in the previous decade, the National Party then concentrated on the legislative measures necessary to crush almost all opposition. Much of this legislation was used against Alex and Blanche la Guma. He wrote *The Stone Country* under these conditions, but nevertheless brought to the novel a limited sense of optimism.

The social contexts for his previous novels had been communities living in areas that faced destruction as a result of apartheid planning. This changes with *The Stone Country*, which contrasts a small, weakened but determined multiracial opposition at liberty with a population of slum dwellers, prisoners and guards who live by the law of the jungle – a situation characterised by heightened repression and the absence of laws. Adams learns that the individualism of prison life has a co-operative dimension, which ensures that most prisoners survive – but also preserves the 'law of the jungle'.

The dedication and the Debs epigraph do not mean that La Guma saw himself or his main protagonist as a Debs figure. Rather, they suggest that oppressive and exploitative political and economic systems make little distinction between the types of threats which individuals and organisations pose: "White man don't like no talking back", Gus tells Adams.²³ In comparison with the other prisoners, Adams has a global perspective, but he has no more power to change his immediate environment than they have. This environment is familiar to him, because it is like the slums in which he grew up. Prison represents an unwelcome return to the past and to familiar, dangerous territory, but brings with it additional problems. The most significant of these is that of invisible contamination through sexual penetration.

Sexual imagery is common among the writings of political prisoners on their jail experiences. It often accompanies a distinction between the self-consciously pure and principled 'political' prisoners and their 'common' counterparts. La Guma shared with these other writers a horror and disgust at same-sex relations. In his early journalism on Roeland Street jail he blamed prison conditions. Processes of displacement and transposition at work in his fiction resulted in the image of Butcherboy's 'deadly embrace' that unites death, destruction and demasculinisation with same-sex desire in his fight with Yusef the Turk and the former's collaboration with the fat guard whose body is feminised and mocked.

Adams remains ambivalent towards his fellow prisoners. La Guma draws on Sir Walter Scott's Emir in *The Talisman* and the more contemporary but equally romantic image of the 'gentleman gangster' for his description of Yusef the Turk, Adams' benighted but noble saviour and protector. In *The Stone Country* he relies less on Scott than he did on Steinbeck for *And a Threefold Cord*. There are other less obvious sources – as the sudden shift in vocabulary from 'tap' to 'faucet' and back to 'tap' suggests – but their identity is harder to specify. In this novel concerns with upward identification and downward adaptation are inextricably linked. The descriptions of Butcherboy and Turk alert us to another anomaly: that the novel criticises apartheid but entrenches a more invidious and invisible set of values based on assumptions about 'criminal physiognomy' and body types. Neither prisoners nor jailers escape condemnation.

The novel's claim to authenticity rests on two factors. La Guma had spent time in jail for the same reasons as its main protagonist, and he had shared a cell with 'a young boy who is the Casbah Kid in the novel'.²⁴ For La Guma, then, the novel was 'true for him' and 'true to life' because the main protagonist experiences jail as an allegory of what the country might become, and this allegory is partly based on autobiographical material. In addition to this 'future imperfect' allegory, life among the prisoners replicates social interaction on the outside among the most oppressed of the oppressed. They are unable to unite against their common enemy. Like Ronny

Pauls, they are antisocial, destructive and have the qualities of animals, for they fight amongst themselves 'like dogs'.

Earlier we saw that La Guma had affirmed the authenticity of *And a Threefold Cord* by denying the influence of Steinbeck and Tolstoy. The way in which La Guma qualifies *The Stone Country's* authenticity returns us to his debt to other writers and to the structure of the work. The influence of other authors does not detract from the authenticity of *The Stone Country* – a text with many voices. These voices range from Scott, to the unidentified American author, to the graffiti on the walls, to his own earlier articles and short stories, to the songs that float through the prison. The songs provide a 'reluctant counterpoint' to the harshness of the 'stone country'. When he was not inside the 'big house' he was under house arrest and this, as Blanche has indicated, affected him 'very badly'. Subjected to arbitrary and unpredictable raids and searches, he found that anything he wrote could be removed without warning and forever.²⁵ This determination to articulate feelings in opposition to the setting of the novel and the conditions under which he wrote it finds expression in the organisation of the novel. Superimposed on its flux of voices and stories is a structure that divides the novel into two parts. Each part begins in the same place, the Isolation Block cell that Adams shares with the Casbah Kid, and follows the same movements backwards and forwards in time. The text has a symmetrical form, yet it remains unfinished and disorganised. Beneath the apparent rationality of its surface lie the threads of so many beginnings, middles, and ends. Of all his works written in South Africa, this is the one over which he had the least personal and political control and the one with the most controlled and ordered form.

Among the many beginnings and endings to which the text refers are the graffiti that precipitates stories within stories. From La Guma's perspective, these graffiti are also a sign that in prison criminals regress to earlier stages of physical and social development, and that this regression leads to death. As a personal archive of La Guma's early journalism for *New Age*, *The Stone Country* incorporates his own adult literary beginnings and expresses a refusal to stop writing. The novel is a

repository for memories of a 'sovereign subject at work'. The presence of these memories signifies a refusal to be censored and rendered 'illegible' by a regime that was making it increasingly difficult for him to possess and control his own work. In its repetitions, the text is a statement of mourning for an identity to which he could not return and a refusal to be rendered invisible to himself and to others. It is also a statement about himself to himself and to a possible foreign audience. It is a way of writing about his own way of writing under conditions of duress and deprivation.²⁶

La Guma's work on *The Conversion* is also a statement about himself to himself. In the absence of any discernible references within it to his earlier life we cannot say whether it too carries memories of a 'sovereign subject at work'. Its links to his immediate condition and the 'future imperfect' allegory associated with *The Stone Country* are much clearer. There are at least three reasons why La Guma copied *The Conversion*. Firstly, the security police could not read it. Secondly, he used the copy to express his feelings to himself. The process of copying the painting offered La Guma a way of expressing his feelings without verbalising them. These feelings could remain invisible to the security police. This also suited La Guma's personal reticence. Had he written down his feelings, the text could have been confiscated by the security police, and this would have left him even more vulnerable. Thirdly, the copy was an attempt to accommodate and work through the experience of banning, house arrest, and isolation. However, copying brought with it other problems. The copy as object in which he had invested his feelings was, by definition, not a new object or a new expression, and this contributed to the unwelcome and unavoidable return of those feelings which the act of copying had initially sought to expel. Like the process of copying and the copy as object, La Guma's psychotic breakdown offered temporary but self-destructive release. The work displays tensions between what the title directs our attention towards and the relative insignificance of its main subject in the composition as a whole. In this unstable zone, the fall of Saul is in the centre of the composition yet simultaneously hard to detect, and the isolation of its subject and the painting's indifference to its viewer complement each other. Viewed generically, the painting occupies an

'unstable zone'. It was a public and private expression visible to La Guma yet invisible to others. It was the expression of a borderline state between madness and sanity. Under these circumstances, exile was the only option.

The analysis of La Guma's copy of Brueghel's *The Conversion of St Paul* focuses on the graphic re-presentation of a trauma. If I view the decision to copy as a response to repression and depression and not as an act of catharsis or liberation, that is because the available evidence favours the former interpretation.

The assumption that by drawing on theoretical positions one can speak about La Guma's decision to copy *The Conversion* is not unproblematic. De Man has criticised 'the highly literary rhetoric of... systematic criticism' – an instance in which 'methodological dogma is being played off against the literary [and artistic] insight'.²⁷ A biographical project that draws together insights based on literary, cultural, psychoanalytic and political theory is particularly vulnerable to this danger. Much of my interpretation of La Guma's decision to copy *The Conversion* is speculative and depends on a specific methodology, but I believe the potential significance of La Guma's decision is too great to ignore.

The legislation used to detain La Guma in the Carneson trial was designed to produce pliable state witnesses. In La Guma's case it failed utterly to achieve its goal. La Guma was prepared to stay in South Africa for as long as the liberation movement required him to do so, even at great cost to himself and his family. He would never have betrayed his comrades. By mid 1966 it was clear to the liberation movement and to him that house arrest and long periods in jail would prevent him from making any significant political contribution. He would be more productively deployed in external organisations and campaigns. His departure from South Africa saved his marriage, his family, and his sanity. It also enabled him to continue with that combination of writing and politics on which much of his reputation deservedly rests. Splits in the external mission of the CPC, and discussions about the role of the congresses and the racial composition of the ANC all required the participation of someone who was totally committed to the national liberation struggle led by the ANC, and who saw coloureds as a specific national group. Over the next nineteen

years until his death in Havana in 1985, La Guma would hold several important positions in the ANC and in international peace and cultural organisations.

In journalism, literature, politics and art he wrestled with several related problems. These included how to resolve the relationships between multiple voices, how to narrate experiences of time and memory, or how to define coloured identity, and how to reconcile his understanding and experience of this identity with the identity to which he felt the majority of SACPO's potential constituency adhered. Today we try to understand and resolve these issues in post-modern terms. There is room for post-modern readings of his work, provided they acknowledge his commitment to socialism and national liberation politics.

La Guma was censored by the apartheid regime at a time when his works were relevant and Marxist literary criticism was more widely practised. The unbanning of La Guma's writings in South Africa coincided with the academy's shift away from materialist analyses. In effect La Guma's work has been subjected to a double censorship that first made it unavailable and then made it unfashionable. This is not a suggestion that we return to literary theory based on unreconstructed Marxism or that we rediscover La Guma as an 'ordinary' post-modernist. Rather, it is a request for critics to examine La Guma's work using the tools and tropes of contemporary theory rather than to dismiss his work as the simple reflection of the political theory and practice in which he believed so strongly. His writing does reflect his political, literary, cultural and artistic concerns. Many of these concerns are as important today as they were forty-five years ago. The challenge is to find solutions to these problems using the tools of contemporary theory.

This thesis begins and ends by using psychoanalytic concepts to reconstruct periods of La Guma's life that were outside the terrain of language. By reading his work – defined in the broadest terms – we gain insight into a complex and at times contradictory individual who was productive under conditions that many people would find unbearable. This thesis has highlighted Alex la Guma's many talents and the ways in which he used them. It has increased our understanding of the man whom J.M. Coetzee once described as 'plausibly...the most substantial writer the

Western Cape had produced' but not necessarily, or not only, because of his writings.²⁸

Endnotes

- ¹ G. Seferis, *Collected Poems* (Anvil Press, London, 1982), p. 93.
- ² V.I. Lenin, *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (The Crisis in Our Party)*, in *Selected Works* Vol. I (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977), pp. 242-421.
- ³ F. Meltzer, *Hot Property: The Stakes and Claims of Literary Originality* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994), p. 16; M. Finlay, 'Post-modernizing psychoanalysis/Psychoanalysing post-modernity' *Free Associations*, no. 16, 1989, p. 61.
- ⁴ S. Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', p. 15.
- ⁵ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1981), p. 151.
- ⁶ S.R. Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1983), pp. 237-238.
- ⁷ D.A. Miller, *Narrative and Its Discontents* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1981), pp. 266-267.
- ⁸ C. Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known* (Free Association Books, London, 1987), p. 39.
- ⁹ P. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1984), pp. 276, 277.
- ¹⁰ Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object*, p. 17.
- ¹¹ La Guma, 'Why I Became a Communist', p. 59.
- ¹² S. Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', pp. 14-15.
- ¹³ *South African Political Materials*, 2:DS2:30/4, 2:DS2:92/15.
- ¹⁴ H. Segal, 'Notes on symbol formation', p. 168 and J. Steiner, 'The interplay between pathological organisations and the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions', pp. 324-325, both in E.B. Spillius (ed.), *Melanie Klein Today* Vol. I. (Routledge, London, 1988); C. Chase, "'Transference" as trope and persuasion', in S. Rimmon-Kenan (ed.), *Discourse in Psychoanalysis and Literature* (Methuen, London, 1987), p. 220.
- ¹⁵ M. Sienart, 'Painting the eye', in B. Breytenbach, *Painting the Eye* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1993), p. 20.
- ¹⁶ R. Williams, 'The Ragged-Arsed Philanthropists', in R. Williams, *Writing in Society* (Verso, London, 1991), pp. 254-255.
- ¹⁷ La Guma, 'Culture and Liberation', in C. Abrahams (ed.), *Memories of Home*, pp. 51-62.
- ¹⁸ A.S. Byatt, *The Biographer's Tale* (Chatto and Windus, London, 2000), pp. 164-165.
- ¹⁹ La Guma, 'To Literary Gazette', p. 38.
- ²⁰ J.M. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*, p. 263.
- ²¹ J.L. Borges, 'Kafka and His Precursors', in *Labyrinths* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1981), p. 236.
- ²² La Guma, quoted in C. Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, p. 3.
- ²³ La Guma, *The Stone Country*, p. 132.
- ²⁴ La Guma, quoted in C. Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, p. 87.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50.
- ²⁶ J. Derrida, *The Post Card* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987), p. 303.
- ²⁷ P. de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's reading of Rousseau', in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1995, 2nd edition, revised), p. 139.
- ²⁸ J.M. Coetzee, 'Interview: Obscenity and Censorship', in *Doubling the Point*, p. 301.

Bibliography

1. Manuscript Sources

The Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection. Mayibuye Centre Archives, University of the Western Cape.

Brian Bunting Papers. Mayibuye Centre Archives, University of the Western Cape.

Correspondence. G. Herman to R. Field, 19 February 1997.

Correspondence. U. Beier to R. Field, 31 August 1994.

Correspondence. S. Forman to R. Field, 21 April 1993.

Correspondence. G. Hallett to R. Field, 4 January 1993.

2. Printed Official Sources

Cape of Good Hope Education Gazette. Cape Town: Department of Public Education, 1933-1938.

Departement van Gevangnisse [Department of Prisons]. Geheime Omsendbrief No. 4 van 1960. Pretoria, 14 April 1960.

Government Gazette Vol. 94. Pretoria: Government Printers, 1958. pp. 48-49.

Plot/Folio no. 6804. Cape Town Office of the Master of the Rolls.

R vs Adams and Others [Treason Trial]. Pretoria: Government Printers, 1958.

R vs Farid Adams and Others [Treason Trial]. Pretoria: Special Criminal Court, 29 March 1961.

R vs Adams and Others [Treason Trial] Vol. II. p. 171.

S vs Fred Carneson. Cape Supreme Court Papers. Cape Town: National Archives, 1/1/1/744.

Union Statistics for Fifty Years. Pretoria: Bureau of Census and Statistics, 1960.

3. Newspapers and Periodicals

Advance

Cape Argus

Cape Standard

Cape Times

Fighting Talk

The Guardian

The Liberator: A Non-European Anti-Imperialist Magazine

New Age

Post

South African Worker

The Sun

Treason Trial Defence Fund Press Summaries

Umsebenzi

Youth for a New South Africa

4. Political Materials

South African Political Materials. Bloomington: South African Research Archives Project, 1977.

'Memorandum dated June 1968 from the South African Coloured People's Congress' (Special Committee on the Policies of *Apartheid* of the Government of the Republic of South Africa (A/AC.115/L.229), United Nations: New York, 1968).

5. Interviews

Alexander, Ray. Interview by R. Field, 10 June 1993.

Arendse, Andy. Interview by Roger Field, June 1999.

Bunting, B and W. Kodesh. Interview by A. Odendaal, 25 July 1993.

Cairns, Clifford, Arthur Hendrikse, Stanley Brache, Percival Hardenberg, Cader Khatieb, Cornelius Kleinhaus, Aisha Osman (née Amlay). Interview by R. Field, 19 November 1996.

Carneson, Fred. Interview by R. Field, 3 November 1979.

Clarke, Peter. Interview by R. Field, 26 October, 1996.

Combrinck, I. Dr. Interview by R. Field, 5 February 1997.

Dempers, Joan (née La Guma). Interview by M. Adhikari, 25 May 1993.

Feinberg, Barry. Interview by R. Field, 5 May 1993.

Hallett, George. Interview by R. Field, 2 April 1993.

La Guma, Barto. Interview by R. Field, 29 December 1996.

La Guma, Blanche. Interviews by R. Field, 17 April 1998, 15 May 1998.

La Guma, Blanche. Interview by A. Odendaal, 4 April 1989.

La Guma, Blanche. Interview by B Chandramohan. B. Chandramohan, *A Study in Trans-Ethnicity*, pp. 194-205.

La Guma, Blanche. Interview by W. Kodesh, 24 August 1993 (transcribed by Rosemary Ridd).

Nash, Dora (née Alexander). Interview by R. Field, 3 December 1994.

Sachs, Albie. Interview by R. Field, 11 December 2000.

Wannenburgh, Alf. Interview by R. Field, 22 May 1998.

6. Primary Sources

6.1 Alex la Guma

La Guma, A. *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*. London: Heinemann, 1979.

----- *A Walk in the Night and Other Stories*. London: Heinemann, 1967.

----- *And a Threefold Cord*. 1964. London: Kliptown, 1988.

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

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

----- *Liberation Chabalala: The World of Alex la Guma*. A. Odendaal and R. Field (eds). Bellville: Mayibuye Press, 1993.

----- *Jimmy la Guma: A Biography*. 1964. (M. Adhikari (ed). Cape Town: Friends of the South African Library, 1997.

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

----- 'Colour Blind'. Original ts., n.d. The Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection. Mayibuye Centre, University of the Western Cape.

- 'The Spear'. Original ts., n.d. The Blanche and Alex la Guma Collection. Mayibuye Centre, University of the Western Cape.
- 'Etude'. *New Age*, 24 January 1957, rpt. in shortened form as 'Nocturne' in *Quartet*, R. Rive (ed.), pp. 111-116.
- 'At the Portagee's', in *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 108-109.
- 'A Matter of Taste', in *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 125-130.
- 'The Gladiators', in *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 114-120.
- 'The Lemon Orchard', in *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 131-36.
- 'Blankets'. *Black Orpheus*, 15 (1964), pp. 57-58; repr. in *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 121-124.
- 'Tattoo Marks and Nails'. *Black Orpheus*, 14 (1964); repr. in *A Walk in the Night*, pp. 97-107.
- 'Battle for Honour'. *Drum*, November 1958.
- 'A Christmas Story'. *Fighting Talk*, December 1956/January 1957, p. 2.
- 'Out of Darkness'. *Africa South*, 1957; rpr. in R. Rive (ed.), *Quartet*, pp. 33-38.
- 'A Glass of Wine', in R. Rive (ed.), *Quartet*, pp. 91-96..
- 'Slipper Satin', in R. Rive (ed.), *Quartet*, pp. 67-73.
- 'The Machine'. *Fighting Talk* (October 1956), pp. 8-9
- 'Coffee for the Road', in E.A. Komey and E. Mphahlele (ed.), *Modern African Stories*. London: Faber and Faber, 1964, pp. 85-94.
- 'Identical Books', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp.3-5.
- 'The Coons', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp.113-4.
- 'The Dead End Kids of Hanover Street', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 9-10.
- 'The Picture in the Parlour', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 167-169.
- 'Racketeers', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 207-9.
- 'Wild West Show', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 209-210.
- 'Uncle Sam', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 171.
- 'Ten Days in Roeland Street Jail', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 16.
- 'Big Chief Buttonhole', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp.134-135.
- 'Liedtjie for the Masters', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 114-115.
- '156 Families to Feed', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 29-30.
- 'Time to Think', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 42-46.
- 'Ah, Dis Die Economic Boycott', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 130-131.
- 'Brickbats and Bouquets', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 149.
- 'Government Terrorists', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 159-160.
- 'American Way of Life', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 171.
- 'Court Cameos', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp.38-39.
- 'Ncincilili! In Praise of Wilton Mkwayi!', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 41.
- 'The City of Gold', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 49-50.
- 'Langa 1960', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 141-145.
- 'Forty Per Cent Poll', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 127-128.
- 'SACPC Statement', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 152-3.
- 'Coloured Convention', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 160-161.
- 'Parliament', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 184.
- 'Herr Doktor Verwoerd PM', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 186.
- 'A Day at Court', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 7.
- 'Colouredstan', in *Liberation Chabalala*, pp. 133-4.
- 'Trying Time', in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 102.
- 'To *Literary Gazette*', in C. Abrahams (ed.), *Memories of Home*, pp. 37-42.

- , 'Culture and Liberation', in C. Abrahams (ed.), *Memories of Home*, pp. 51-62
- , 'Memories of Home', in C. Abrahams (ed.), *Memories of Home*, pp. 33-36.
- , 'The Real Picture', in C. Abrahams (ed.), *Memories of Home*, pp. 15-29.
- , 'Paul Robeson and Africa', in C. Abrahams (ed.), *Memories of Home*, 71-78.
- , 'On a Wedding Day', in C. Abrahams (ed.), *Memories of Home*, pp. 81-95.
- , 'What I learned from Maxim Gorky'. *Lotus: Afro-Asian Writings*, 34 (Oct-Dec 1977), pp. 164-168.
- , 'Alexander Solzhenitsyn: "Life through a crooked eye"'. *The African Communist* no. 56 (1974), pp. 69-79.
- , 'Non-Europeans and Communism'. *Cape Standard*, 5 August 1947.
- , 'Non-European Audience Hears Emyln Williams'. *New Age*, 24 January 1957.
- [pseud. Eugene Alexander]. 'Etude'. *New Age*, 24 January 1957.
- , 'Can We Build a New Life Overseas?'. *New Age*, 7 February 1957.
- [pseud. A. Adams]. 'Why I Joined the Communist Party'. *The African Communist* no. 47 (1971), pp. 57-61.
- [pseud. Gala]. 'Doing Something Useful'. *The African Communist* no. 89 (1982), pp. 49-52.
- , Speech at Congress of Democrats public meeting on Grand Parade, Cape Town, 8 June 1955, in *R vs Adams and Others* [Treason Trial]. Pretoria: Government Printers, 1958.

6.2 Jimmy la Guma

- La Guma, Jimmy. 'Dark folks arise, the long night is over'. *The Liberator*, 1, 1 (1937), p. 17.
- , [J.A. la G.]. 'Golden Morn'. *The Liberator*, 1, 4 (1937), p.4.
 - , 'Down to the Masses'. *The Liberator*, 1, 1 (1937), p. 2.
 - , 'We demand Social Equality!'. *The Liberator*, 1, 1 (1937), pp. 9-10.
 - , 'Plain Politics for the Oppressed Peoples'. *The Sun* 17 April 1936.

6.3 Blanche la Guma

- La Guma, Blanche. 'A Wife's Memory', in C. Abrahams (ed.), *Memories of Home*, pp. 7-14.
- , 'A child is born'. *New Age*, 2 August 1956

7. Secondary Sources

- A Dictionary of South African English*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Abrahams, C. *Alex la Guma*. Boston: Twayne, 1985.
- , (ed.). *Memories of Home: The Writings of Alex la Guma*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 1991.
 - Abrahams, P. *Dark Testament*. 1942. Nendeln: Krauss Reprint, 1972.
 - , *Return to Goli*. London: Faber and Faber, 1953.
 - , *Tell Freedom*. London: Faber and Faber, 1954.
 - Adhikari, M. *James la Guma*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1996.
 - , 'Let us live for our children': *The Teachers' League of South Africa, 1913-1914*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1993.

- (ed.). *Straatpraatjies: Language, politics and popular culture in Cape Town, 1909-1922*. Pretoria: J.L. van Schaik, 1996.
- . "'I'm not black" and "What's my white got to do with it?": An Insider's Reading of Alex la Guma's *A Walk in the Night and Other Stories*'. Paper presented at La Guma Colloquium, University of the Western Cape, December 1995.
- Altman, P. 'Plays of Protest', *Fighting Talk* (November 1958), pp. 13-14.
- A.N.C. Veteran. 'Hamba Kahle Comrade Alex la Guma'. *Sechaba*, January 1986, pp. 28-31.
- Asein, S.O. 'Symbolic Setting in the South African Novel', in S.O. Asein and A.O. Ashaolu (eds), *Studies in the African Novel*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1986, pp. 207-224.
- Astrachan, A.M. 'Review of *A Walk in the Night*'. *Black Orpheus*, 14 (1959), p. 59.
- Audit Bureau of Circulation of South Africa. 'Certificates of Average Nett Sales'. Johannesburg, 1958, 1959.
- Ball, F.C. *One of the Damned: the Life and Times of Robert Tressell, Author of the Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973.
- Ballinger, M. *From Union to Apartheid: A Trek to Isolation*. Cape Town: Juta, 1969.
- Balutansky, K., *The Novels of Alex La Guma: The Representation of a Political Conflict*. Washington. Three Continents Press, 1989.
- Barker, F. *Comics: ideology, power and the critics*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989.
- Barnett, N. 'Race, Housing and Town Planning in Cape Town, circa 1920-1940'. University of Cape Town: M.A. thesis, 1993.
- Barratt, H. 'South Africa's Dark Night: Metaphor and Symbol in La Guma's Fiction'. *The Literary Griot: International Journal of Black Oral and Literary Studies*, 3, 2 (1991), pp.28-36.
- Bauman, Z. 'Broken Lives, Broken Strategies', in Z. Bauman, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality*. Oxford, Blackwell, 1995. pp. 72-105.
- Beegl, S.F. "'The Undefeated" and *Sangre y Arena*: Hemingway's *Mano a Mano* with Blasco Ibáñez', in K. Rosen (ed.), *Hemingway Repossessed*, pp. 71-86.
- Beier, U. (ed.). *Introduction to African Literature: An anthology of critical writing*. London: Longman, 1979.
- Bell, T., *Unfinished Business: South Africa, Apartheid and Truth*. Cape Town: Redworks/UOP, 2001.
- Benjamin, W. *Illuminations*. Fontana: Glasgow, 1977.
- Benson, P. *Black Orpheus, Transition and Modern Cultural Awakening in Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- Berman, E. *Art and Artists of South Africa*. Cape Town: Southern Book Publishers, 1983.
- Berman, M. *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. London: Verso, 1990.
- Bernstein, J.M. *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.
- Biggs, D. *The 1999 South African Plonk Buyer's Guide*. Cape Town: Ampersand Press, 1999.
- Blackbeard B. and M. Williams (eds). *The Smithsonian Collection of Newspaper Comics*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1977.
- Boersner, D. *The Bolsheviks and the National and Colonial Question*. Geneva: Libraire E. Droz, 1957.

- Bollas, C. *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis and the Unthought Known*. London: Free Association Books, 1987.
- Bonner, P. 'The Transvaal Native Congress 1917-1920: The Radicalisation of the Black Petty Bourgeoisie on the Rand', in S. Marks and R. Rathbone (eds), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa*. London: Longman, 1982, pp. 270-313.
- Borges, J.L. 'Kafka and His Precursors', in *Labyrinths*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981, pp. 234-236.
- Bosman, H.C. 'Funeral Earth'. *Fighting Talk* June/July 1958.
- 'Unto dust'. *Fighting Talk* August 1958.
- Bradford, H. *A Taste of Freedom: The ICU in Rural South Africa 1924-1930*. Johannesburg: Ravan, 1987.
- Breytenbach, B. *Painting the Eye*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1993.
- Brooks, P. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.
- Brutus, D. 'African Thought: A Tribute to Alex la Guma', in C. Abrahams (ed.), *Memories of Home*, pp. 3-5.
- Bunche, R.J. *An African-American in South Africa: The Travel Notes of Ralph J. Bunche, 28 September 1937 - 1 January 1938*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1992.
- Bunting, B. *Moses Kotane: South African Revolutionary*. London: Inkululeko Publications, 1975.
- *The Rise of the South African Reich*. London: International Defence and Aid Fund, 1986.
- 'Tribute to a fighter for democracy'. *Cape Times*, 10 February 1999.
- Introduction, in E. Roux, *S.P. Bunting: A Political Biography*. Bellville: Mayibuye Press, 1993.
- Preface. A. la Guma, *And a Threefold Cord*.
- Byatt, A.S. *The Biographer's Tale*. London: Chatto and Windus, 2000.
- Caldwell, E. *Tobacco Road*. London: Falcon Press, 1948.
- Caldwell, M.E. 'A New Consideration of the Intercalary Chapters In *The Grapes of Wrath*'. *Markham Review*, 3, 1973, pp. 115-119.
- Cape Times South African Directory*. Cape Town: Cape Times, 1933-1943.
- Cape Town City Council. *City Survey*. July 1957.
- Carneson, F. 'The Franchise Action Committee', in A. Drew (ed.), *South Africa's Radical Tradition* Vol. II., pp.103-106.
- Carneson-McGregor, L. *Homage to Hope: South African Memories*. Aspen: London, 1996.
- Carpenter, W. 'The Scene of Representation in Alex La Guma's Later Novels'. *English in Africa*, 18, 2 (October 1981). pp. 1-18.
- "'Ovals, Spheres, Ellipses and Sundry Bulges": Alex la Guma Imagines the Human Body'. *Research in African Literatures*, 22, 4 (1992). pp. 77-98.
- Carter R. and W. Nash. *Seeing Through Language*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994.
- Cassuto, D. 'Turning Wine into Water: Water as Privileged Signifier in *The Grapes of Wrath*'. *Papers on Language and Literature*, 29, 1 (1993), pp. 67-96.
- Castledon, R. *World History*. London: Parragon, 1994.
- Chandramohan, B. *A Study in Trans-Ethnicity in Modern South Africa: The Writings of Alex la Guma*. Lampeter: Mellen Research University Press, 1992.

- Chase, C. "'Transference' as trope and persuasion", in S. Rimmon-Kenan (ed.), *Discourse in Psychoanalysis and Literature*. London: Methuen, 1987. pp. 211-232.
- Chiaro, D. *The Language of Verbal Play*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Chodorow, N. 'Family Structure and Feminine Personality', in M.Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (eds), *Woman, Culture and Society*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974. pp. 43-66
- Christopher, A.J. *The Atlas of Apartheid*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Cobley, A. *Class and Consciousness: The Black Petty Bourgeoisie in South Africa, 1924-1950*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1990.
- Coetzee, A. *Marxisme en die Afrikaanse Letterkunde*. Bellville: University of the Western Cape, 1988.
- Coetzee, J.M. *Doubling the Point*, D. Attwell (ed.). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- , *White Writing*. Sandton: Radix, 1988.
- , 'Obscenity and Censorship: Interview', in J.M. Coetzee, *Doubling the Point*, pp. 297-301.
- , 'Man's Fate in the Novels of Alex la Guma', in J.M. Coetzee, *Doubling the Point*, pp. 334-360.
- , 'Into the Dark Chamber: The Writer and the South African State', in J.M. Coetzee, *Doubling the Point*, pp. 361-368.
- , 'Alex la Guma and the Responsibilities of the South African Writer'. *Journal of the New African Literature and the Arts*, 9-10 (1971).
- Coplans, J. *Roy Lichtenstein*. New York: Praeger, 1972.
- Coplans J. et al. *Andy Warhol*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1994.
- Cornwell, G. 'Protest in Fiction: an approach to Alex la Guma'. Rhodes University: M.A. thesis, 1979.
- , 'And a Threefold Cord: La Guma's Neglected Masterpiece?'. Paper presented at La Guma Colloquium, University of the Western Cape, December 1995.
- Couzens, T. 'The Black Press and Black Literature in South Africa 1900-1950'. *English Studies in Africa*, XIX, 2 (1976), pp. 93-99.
- Craib, I. *Psychoanalysis and Social Theory: The Limits of Sociology*. New York: Harvester, 1989.
- Cronin, J. *Inside*. Johannesburg: Ravan, 1983.
- , "'Laat ons nou ranks vassa" – African poets and the use of Afrikaans', in J.F. Smith et al (eds), *Swart Afrikaanse Skrywers*, pp. 50-59.
- Cross M. and L. Chisholm, 'The Roots of Segregated Schooling in Twentieth-Century South Africa', in M. Nkomo (ed.), *Pedagogy of Domination: Toward a Democratic Education in South Africa*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990, pp. 43-74.
- Daymond, M.J., J.U. Jacobs and M. Lenta (eds). *Momentum: On Recent South African Writing*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1984.
- Davenport, T.R.H. *South Africa: A Modern History*. Johannesburg: Macmillan, 1987.
- De Man, P. 'The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau', in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995, 2nd edition, revised, pp. 102-141.
- Dennis Edwards' Cape Town and Suburban Directory*. Cape Town: Dennis Edwards, 1932.

- Derrida, J. *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1982.
- *The Post Card*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Desai, B., in *Liberation Chabalala*, p. 124.
- Devost, N. 'Hemingway's girls: Unnaming and renaming Hemingway's female characters'. *Hemingway Review*, 14, 1 (1994), pp. 146-150.
- Dingome, J.N. 'Mbari', in A.S. Gérard (ed.), *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kaidó, 1986, pp. 679-688.
- Donaldson and Brady's Cape Town and Suburban Directory*. Cape Town, 1917-1932.
- Dreiser, T. *Dreiser Looks at Russia*. London: Constable, 1928.
- Drew, A. (ed.). *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History*. Vol. II: 1943-1964. Cape Town: Buchu Books, 1997.
- Duby, G. 'Memories with No Historian', *Yale French Studies*, No. 59, 1980, pp. 7-16.
- Edel, L. 'Confessions of a Biographer', in G. Moraitis and G.H. Pollock (eds), *Psychoanalytic Studies of Biography*, pp. 3-26.
- Eisner, W. *Comics and Sequential Art*. Tamarac: Poorhouse Press, 1985.
- Ellis, D. (ed.) *Imitating Art: Essays in Biography*. London: Pluto Press, 1993.
- 'Introduction: Explanation in Biography: A Conversation with Frank Cioffi', in D. Ellis, (ed.), *Imitating Art*, pp. 1-18.
- Eribon, D. *Michel Foucault*. London: Faber and Faber, 1993.
- Evans, M. 'Masculine and Feminine Biography', in D. Ellis (ed.), *Imitating Art: Essays in Biography*, pp. 108-124.
- Fabre, M. *From Harlem to Paris: Black American Writers in France, 1840-1980*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991.
- Fast, H. *The Passion of Saccho and Vanzetti: A New England Legend*. London: Bodley Head, 1954.
- Flecker, J. *Hassan*. London: Heinemann, 1951.
- Franck, B., G. Manuel and D. Hatfield. *District Six*. Cape Town: Longmans, 1967.
- Field, R. 'Fellow Travellers in an Antique Land: La Guma and Uncle Lenin'. *Social Dynamics*, 20, 1 (Winter 1994), pp. 93-120.
- 'Kaaps, Colouredism and Comics: Alex la Guma's early writings'. *Pretexts*, 7, 1 (1998), pp. 57-80.
- 'Art and the Man: La Guma's Comics and Paintings'. *Critical Survey*, 11, 2 (1999), pp. 45-53.
- 'La Guma's Little Libby: The Adventures of Liberation Chabalala', in S. Newell (ed.), *Readings in African Popular Fiction*. London: International African Institute/Indiana University Press/James Currey, 2002, pp. 171-180.
- Field, S. 'Ambiguous Belongings: Negotiating Hybridity in Cape Town, 1940s-1990s'. *Kronos: Journal of Cape History*, 25 (1998), pp. 227-238.
- Finlay, M. 'Post-modernizing psychoanalysis/Psychoanalysing post-modernity'. *Free Associations*, no. 16, (1989), pp. 43-80.
- Fleming, W. *Art and Ideas*. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991.
- Foster, D. *Detention and Torture in South Africa: psychological, legal and historical studies*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1987.
- Freeman, M. *Rewriting the self: History, memory, narrative*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Freud, S. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. XVII. London: Hogarth Press, 1955, pp. 2-64

- , *Civilization and its Discontents*. London: Hogarth Press, 1979.
- , *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*. London: Hogarth Press, 1981.
- , 'Family Romances', in *On Sexuality*. London: Penguin, 1991, pp. 217-226.
- , 'From the History of an Infantile Neurosis (The "Wolf Man")', in S. Freud, *Case Histories*. Vol. II. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979, pp. 227-366.
- , 'Mourning and Melancholia', in S. Freud, *On Metapsychology*. London: Penguin, 1991, pp. 245-268.
- , *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Harmondsworth, Penguin: 1978.
- Foucault, M. *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. I. New York: Vintage Books, 1980.
- Gardiner, M. *The Dialogics of Critique: M.M. Bakhtin and the Theory of Ideology*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Gerwel, G.J. 'Van Petersen tot die hede: 'n kritiese bestekopname', in J.F. Smith et al (eds), *Swart Afrikaanse Skrywers*. Bellville: University of the Western Cape, 1985, pp. 9-20.
- Gikandi, S. 'Race and the modernist aesthetic', in T. Youngs (ed.), *Writing and Race*, pp. 147-165.
- Giller N. and N. Duncanson. *Crown of Thorns: The Bitter History of a Century's Heavyweight Championship Boxing*. London: Boxtree, 1992.
- Goldin, I. *Making Race: The Politics and Economics of Coloured Identity in South Africa*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1987
- , 'The Reconstitution of Coloured Identity in the Western Cape', in S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds), pp. 156-181.
- Gray, S. 'The long eye of history: four autobiographical texts by Peter Abrahams', *Pretexts* 2, 2, (1990), pp. 99-115.
- Grossman, F. *Pieter Breugel: Complete Edition of the Paintings*. London: Phaidon, 1973.
- Green, A. 'Projection', in A. Green, *On Private Madness*. London: Hogarth Press, 1986, pp. 84-103.
- , 'The Dead Mother', in A. Green, *On Private Madness*, pp. 142-173.
- Harmel, M. 'Observations on Certain Aspects of Imperialism in South Africa', in A. Drew (ed.), *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History*. Vol. II: 1943-1964. pp. 262-270.
- , "'Die Burger" is Right... Boycott IS a Two-Edged Sword'. *Fighting Talk* (May 1959), pp. 3-4.
- Harris, M. *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*. London: Routledge, 1968.
- Harrison, C. 'The Effects of Landscape', in W.J.T. Mitchell (ed.), *Landscape and Power*. London: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Head, B. *The Cardinals with Meditations and short stories*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1993.
- Hellman, J. *Fables of Fact: The New Journalism as New Fiction*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981.
- Hemingway, E. *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. New York: Scribner's Sons, 1940.
- , *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1955.
- , 'To-day is Friday', in E. Hemingway, *Men Without Women*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955, pp. 143-147.
- , 'Hills Like White Elephants', in *Men Without Women*, pp. 51-57.
- Hermann, T. 'Formal Analogies in the Texts and Paintings of Ernest Hemingway and Paul Cezanne', in K. Rosen (ed), *Hemingway Repossessed*, pp. 29-33.
- Hill, C. *Milton and the English Revolution*. London: Faber and Faber, 1979.

- Hill, R.A. and G.A. Pirio. "'African for the Africans': the Garvey Movement in South Africa, 1920-1940', in S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds), pp. 209-253.
- Hinton, R. 'Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*'. *Explicator*, 56, 2 (1998), pp. 101-104.
- Honey, M. (ed.). *Shadowed Dreams: Women's Poetry of the Harlem Renaissance*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989.
- Horrell, M. *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1966*. Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1967.
- *The Education of the Coloured Community in South Africa 1652 to 1970*. Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1970.
- Hugo, V. *Les Miserables*. London: Collins, 1962.
- Human Sciences Research Council. *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Vol. II. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1972.
- Hutchinson, A. 'It Could Never be in Vain'. *Sechaba Special Festac '77 Issue*. p. 5.
- Ingle, S. *Socialist Thought in Imaginative Literature*. London: Macmillan Press, 1979.
- Iyer, L.H. 'African Views of the United States in the Works of Achebe, La Guma and Ngugi'. University of California: Ph.D. thesis, 1987.
- Ishmael, S. *Ashes of Meditation: A Book of Verse*. London: Arthur H. Stockwell, 1936.
- Jameson, F. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. London: Routledge, 1983.
- JanMohamed, A.R. 'Alex La Guma: the Literary and Political Functions of Marginality in the Colonial Situation'. *Boundary 2: A Journal of Postmodern Literature and Culture*, 11, 1-2 (1982-1983), pp. 271-290.
- *Manichean Aesthetics*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983.
- Jeppie, S. and C. Soudien (eds). *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present*. Cape Town: Buchu Books, 1990.
- Jeppie, S. 'Historical Process and the Constitution of Subjects: I. D. du Plessis and the Reinvention of the "Malay"'. University of Cape Town: Hons. thesis, 1987.
- 'Aspects of Popular Culture and Class Expression in Inner-Cape Town, circa 1935-1959'. University of Cape Town: M.A. dissertation, 1990.
- Johnson, G.D. 'A Song of Courage'. *The Liberator*, 1, 2 (1937), pp. 19, 21.
- Johnson, H. *The Socialist Sixth of the World*. London: Gollanz, 1939.
- Jordaan, K.A. 'What are the National Groups in South Africa?', in A. Drew (ed.), *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History*. Vol. II: 1943-1964. pp. 270-274.
- Jünger, H. (ed.). *The Literatures of the Soviet Peoples*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1970.
- Juta's Directory of Cape Town, Suburbs and Simonstown*. Cape Town: Juta, 1927-1932.
- Karis, T. and G.M. Carter (eds). *From Protest to Challenge Vol. III Challenge and Violence, 1953-1964*. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1977.
- Karis, T. and G. Gerhart (eds). *From Protest to Challenge Vol. V Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1979*. Pretoria: Unisa Press, 1997.
- Keegan, T. *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1996.
- Kelley, R. "'Afric's Sons with Banner Red": African-American Communists and the Politics of Culture, 1919-1934', in S. Lemelle and R. Kelley (eds), *Imagining Home: Class, Culture and Nationalism in the African Diaspora*. London: Verso, 1994, pp. 35-54.

- Kettering, K. 'Domesticating Uzbeks: Central Asians in Soviet decorative art of the twenties and thirties', in T. Barringer and T. Flynn (eds), *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum*. London: Routledge, 1998, pp. 95-110.
- Klein, M. *The Writings of Melanie Klein*. Vol. I. London: Hogarth Press, 1985.
- 'Early Analysis', in M. Klein, *The Writings of Melanie Klein*, pp.77-105.
- 'The Rôle of the School in the Libidinal Development of the Child', in M. Klein, *The Writings of Melanie Klein*, pp. 59-76.
- 'The Psycho-Analytic Play Technique: Its History and Significance', in J. Mitchell (ed.), *The Selected Melanie Klein*, pp. 35-54.
- 'Early Stages of the Oedipus Conflict', in J. Mitchell (ed.), *The Selected Melanie Klein*, pp. 69-83.
- 'The Importance of Symbol Formation in the Development of the Ego', in J. Mitchell (ed.), *The Selected Melanie Klein*, pp. 95-111.
- 'Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States', in J. Mitchell, (ed.), *The Selected Melanie Klein*, pp. 146-174.
- 'Notes of Some Schizoid Mechanisms', in J. Mitchell (ed.), *The Selected Melanie Klein*, pp. 175-200.
- Klima, V. *South African Prose Writing in English*. Prague: Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, 1971.
- Kotane, M. 'Boycott of Elections under the "Representation of Natives Act"', in A. Drew (ed.), *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History*. Vol. II: 1943-1964. pp. 173-177.
- Lacan, J. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. London: Penguin, 1991.
- 'The agency of the letter of the unconscious or reason since Freud', in *Ecrits*. London: Routledge: 1992, pp. 146-178.
- Lalu, P. 'Lived Texts, Written Texts and Con-Texts: Eddie Roux and the Making of the South African Past'. University of the Western Cape: M.A. dissertation, 1995.
- Lejeune, P. *On Autobiography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
- 'The Autobiographical Pact', in P. Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, pp. 3-30.
- 'The Ironic Narrative of Childhood: Vallès', in *On Autobiography*, pp. 53-69.
- 'The Order of Narrative in Sartre's *Les Mots*', in *On Autobiography*, pp. 70-108.
- 'The Autobiographical Pact (bis)', in P. Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, pp. 119-137.
- 'The Autobiography of Those Who Do Not Write', in *On Autobiography*, pp. 185-215.
- Lenin, V.I. 'Disruption of Unity Under Cries of Unity' in *Selected Works* Vol. I. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977. pp. 548-566.
- "'Left-Wing" Communism – An Infantile Disorder', in V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works* Vol. III. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977, pp. 291-369.
- Lerumo, A. *Fifty Fighting Years*. London: Inkululeko Publications, 1980.
- Lewis, A. 'Reflections on Education in District Six, 1930s to 1950s', in S. Jeppie and C. Soudien (eds) *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present*. pp. 185-191.
- Lewis, E. *Wild Deer*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1984.
- Lewis, G. *Between the Wire and the Wall: A History of South African 'Coloured' Politics*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1987.

- Lindfors, B. 'Contradictory and Complementary Strategies of Protest in Alex la Guma's *A Walk in the Night*'. *Afrique Australe*, 12 (1989), pp. 125-139.
- , 'Robin Hood Realism in South African English Fiction'. *Africa Today*, XV, 4 (1968), pp. 16-18.
- , '*Black Orpheus*', in A.S. Gérard (ed.), *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kaidó, 1986, pp. 669-679.
- , 'The Teaching of African Literature at Anglophone African Universities: An Instructive Canon', in B. Lindfors (ed.), *Long Drums and Canons: Teaching and Researching African Literatures*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 1995, pp. 45-60.
- , 'Form and Technique in the Novels of Richard Rive and Alex la Guma'. *Journal of New African Literature and Arts*, 1, 2 (Fall 1966), pp. 10-15.
- Lipman, A. 'What is wrong with local art?'. *Fighting Talk* September 1954, p. 14.
- Lisca, P. 'The Dynamics of Community in *The Grapes of Wrath*', in M. Deakin and P. Lisca (eds), *From Irving to Steinbeck*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1972. pp. 127-140.
- Lodge, D. *The Modes of Modern Writing*. London: Edward Arnold, 1977.
- Lodge, T. *Black politics in South Africa since 1945*. Johannesburg: Ravan, 1983.
- London, J. *The Iron Heel*, in *Jack London: Novels and Social Writings*. New York: Library of America, 1982.
- , *The People of the Abyss*, in *Jack London: Novels and Social Writings*. New York: Library of America, 1982.
- Luckhardt, B and K. Wall. *Organise . . . Or Starve!*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980.
- Lukács, G., *The Theory of the Novel*. London: Merlin Press, 1971.
- , *The Historical Novel*. London: Merlin Press, 1978.
- , 'Narrate or Describe', in *Writer and Critic*. London: Merlin Press, 1978, pp. 110-148.
- Lyth, I.M. 'Pleasure Foods', in *Dynamics of the Social* Vol. II. London: Free Association Books, 1989, pp. 61-122.
- Manuel, G. *Kampvegters*. Cape Town: Nasou, 1967.
- Marks, S. and R. Rathbone (eds). *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa*. London: Longman, 1982.
- Marks, S. and S. Trapido (eds). *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa*. London: Longman, 1987.
- Martin, D.-C. *Coon Carnival: New Year in Cape Town, Past and Present*. David Philip, 1999.
- Marx, K. and F. Engels. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in *Selected Works*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977.
- Mason, A. *The Courtship of Maurice Buckler*. London: Nash and Grayson, 1923.
- Matton, C.G. 'Water Imagery and the Conclusion to *The Grapes of Wrath*'. *North East Modern Language Association News*. 2, 1972, pp. 44-47.
- Matthews, J. *The Party is Over*. Cape Town: Kwela Books, 1997.
- Matthews, J., R. Rive, P. Clarke. 'Willy-Boy!' *Drum* (April 1954), pp. 50-55.
- Maughan-Brown, D. 'Adjusting the Focal Length: Alex la Guma and Exile'. *English in Africa*, 18, 2 (1991), pp. 19-38.
- McCarthy, P. 'House and Shelter as Symbol in *The Grapes of Wrath*'. *South Dakota Review*, 5, 4 (1967). 48-67.

- McCormick, K. 'The Vernacular of District Six', in S. Jeppie and C. Soudien (eds), *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present*, pp. 88-109.
- McDonnell, P. et al. *Krazy Kat: The Comic Art of George Herriman*. New York: Harry Abrams, 1986.
- Meltzer, F. *Hot Property: The Stakes and Claims of Literary Originality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. *Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981.
- Michaels, C. 'An Investigation into the standard of written English composition in the 6th standard of English-medium Coloured Schools in the Cape Peninsula.' University of Cape Town: B.Ed. thesis, 1949.
- Miller, D.A. *Narrative and Its Discontents*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.
- Mitchell J.(ed.). *The Selected Melanie Klein*. London: Penguin, 1988.
- Mkhize, J. 'Social Realism in Alex la Guma's Longer Fiction'. University of Natal: Ph.D. thesis, 1998.
- , 'Alex la Guma's Politics and Aesthetics'. *Alternation*, 5, 1 (1998), pp. 130-168.
- , "'Road to Consciousness": *And a Threefold Cord* and *The Stone Country*', *Alternation*, 5, 2 (1998), pp. 147-165.
- , 'Journalism: The Roots of La Guma's Counter-Discourse'. Paper presented at La Guma Colloquium, University of the Western Cape, December 1995.
- Moore, G. *Twelve African Writers*. London: Hutchinson, 1980.
- Moraitis, G. and G.H. Pollock (eds). *Psychoanalytic Studies of Biography*. Madison: International Humanities Press, 1987.
- Moraitis, G. 'A Psychologist's Journey into a Historian's World: An Experiment in Collaboration', in G. Moraitis and G. H. Pollock (eds), *Psychoanalytic Studies of Biography*, pp. 504-546.
- Mphahlele, E. 'South African Fiction and Autobiography', in B. Lindfors (ed.), *Contemporary Black South African Literature: A Symposium*. Washington: Three Continents Press, 1975, pp. 28-35.
- , 'Writers and Commitment', in U. Beier (ed.), *Introduction to African Literature*, pp. vii-xvii.
- , *Down Second Avenue*. London: Faber and Faber, 1975.
- , *Afrika My Music*. Johannesburg: Ravan, 1984.
- (ed.). *African Writing Today*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967.
- Musson, D. *Johnny Gomas: Voice of the Working Class*. Cape Town: Buchu Books, 1989.
- Ndebele, N. 'The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa'. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 12, 2 (1986), pp. 143-157.
- Ngcelwane, N. *Sala Kahle, District Six*. Cape Town: Kwela Books, 1998.
- Nkosi, L. 'Fiction by Black South Africans: Richard Rive; Bloke Modisane; Ezekiel Mphahlele; Alex la Guma', in U. Beier (ed.), *Introduction to African Literature*, pp. 221-227.
- , 'Alex La Guma: The Man and His Work'. *South African Information and Analysis* (January 1968), pp. 1-8.
- , 'The new African novel: a search for modernism', in *Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature*. London: Longman, 1981, pp. 53-75.
- Odendaal, A and R. Field, eds. *Liberation Chabalala: The World of Alex La Guma*. Bellville: Mayibuye Books, 1993.

- Opland, J. (ed.). *Words that Circle Words: A Choice of South African Oral Poetry*. Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1992.
- , *Xhosa Poets and Poetry*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1998.
- Ortner, S. 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?' in M.Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (eds), *Woman, Culture and Society*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974, pp. 67-88.
- Osborne, H. (ed.) *Oxford Companion to Art* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1975).
- Petersen, K. H. 'South Africa', in B. King (ed.), *The Commonwealth Novel Since 1960*. London: Macmillan, 1991, pp. 125-141.
- Petot, J.-M. *Melanie Klein* Vol. I. Madison: Madison International Universities Press, 1988.
- Pheiffer, R.H. "'Straatpraatjes' – 'n vroeë voorbeeld van Alternatiewe Afrikaans", in M. Adhikari (ed.), *Straatpraatjes*, pp. 141-162.
- Pinnock, D. 'From Argie boys to skolly gangsters: the lumpen-proletarian challenge of the street-corner armies of District Six, 1900-1951', in *Studies in the History of Cape Town* Vol. III. 1980, pp. 131-174.
- Plath, J. 'Le Torero and "The Undeafened": Hemingway's Foray into Analytical Cubism', in K. Rosen (ed), *Hemingway Repossessed*, pp. 9-16.
- Pletsch, C. 'On the Autobiographical Life of Nietzsche', in G. Moraitis and G.H. Pollock (eds), *Psychoanalytic Studies of Biography*, pp. 405-434.
- Ponelis, F. 'Codes in contradiction: The sociolinguistics of "Straatpraatjes"', in M. Adhikari, (ed.), *Straatpraatjes*, pp. 129-140.
- Porter, D. *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Rabkin, D. 'Drum Magazine 1951-1961 and the works of Black South African Writers associated with it' Leeds University: Ph.D. thesis, 1975.
- Reitberger R.C. and W.J. Fuchs. *Comics: Anatomy of a Mass Medium*. London: Studio Vista, 1972.
- Riemenschneider, D. 'The Prisoner in South African Fiction: Alex la Guma's novels *The Stone Country* and *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*'. *ACLALS Bulletin*, 5, 3 (1980).
- Rive, R., J. Matthews, A. la Guma, A. Wannenburg. *Quartet: Four Voices from South Africa*. London: Heinemann, 1963.
- , *African Songs*. Berlin: Seven Seas, 1963.
- , 'Buckingham Palace', *District Six*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1987.
- , 'District Six: Fact and Fiction', in S. Jeppie and C. Soudien (eds), *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present*. pp. 110-116.
- , *Writing Black*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1981.
- , 'Culture, Colouredism and Kaaps'. J.F. Smith et al. (eds), *Swart Afrikaanse Skrywers*. pp. 60-66.
- Robeson, P. 'Robeson Faces the World'. *The Liberator*, 1, 5 (1937), p.16.
- Rogers, J.A. *From Superman to Man* [serialised novel]. *The Liberator*, 1, 1-5 (1937).
- Roscoe, A. *Uhuru's Fire: African literature East to South*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- Rosen K., ed. *Hemingway Repossessed*. Westport: Praeger, 1994.
- Roux, E. *S.P. Bunting: A Political Biography*. Cape Town: Mayibuye Press, 1993.
- , *Time Longer than Rope*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1972.
- Runyon, D. *Guys and Dolls*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960.

- Rutherford, J. *Men's Silences: Predicaments in Masculinity*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Sachs, A. *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs*, London: Harvill Press, 1966.
- Scanlon, P. 'Alex la Guma's Novels of Protest'. *Okike*, 16 (1979), pp. 39-47.
- Schalkwyk, D. 'The rules of physiognomy: reading the convict in South African prison writing'. *Pretexts*, 7, 1 (1998).
- Schoeman, B. *Parlementêre Verkiesings in Suid Afrika, 1910-1976*. Pretoria: Aktuele Publikasies, 1977.
- Scott, W. *The Talisman*. Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1877.
- *Quentin Durward*. Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1877.
- Segal, H. 'Notes on symbol formation', in E.B. Spillus (ed.), *Melanie Klein Today* Vol. I., pp. 168-177.
- Segal, R. 'The Power of the Pound'. *Fighting Talk* (May 1959), pp. 3-4.
- Shannon, E. "'That we may mis-unda-stend each udda": The Rhetoric of *Krazy Kat*'. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 29, 2 (1995), pp. 209-222.
- Sheringham, M. 'The Philosopher, the Poet and the Kaiser: Sartre and Biographical Understanding', in D. Ellis (ed.), *Imitating Life*, pp. 83-107.
- Sienart, M. 'Painting the eye', in B. Breytenbach, *Painting the Eye*, pp. 15-50.
- Simons, H.J. 'Nationalisms in South Africa', in A. Drew (ed.), *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History*. Vol. II: 1943-1964, pp. 275-279.
- Simons, J and R. Simons. *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950*. London: International Defence and Aid for Southern Africa, 1983.
- W. Sisulu. 'Boycott as a Political Weapon', in A. Drew (ed.), *South Africa's Radical Tradition* Vol. II., pp. 188-191.
- 'Freedom of Nations', in R. First (ed.), *South Africans in the Soviet Union*. Johannesburg: Pacific Press, 1955, pp. 8-12.
- Skinner, D. *Apartheid's Violent Legacy: A Report on Trauma in the Western Cape*. Cape Town: The Trauma Centre for Victims of Violence and Torture, 1997.
- Skinner D. and L. Swartz. 'The Consequences for Preschool Children of a Parent's Detention: A Preliminary South African Clinical Study of Caregivers' Reports'. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 30, 2, 1989, pp., 243-259.
- Slavutych, Y. 'Ernest Hemingway in Ukrainian Literature', in W.T. Zyla and W.W. Aycock (eds), *Modern American Fiction: Insights and Foreign Lights*. Lubock: Texas Tech Press, 1972, pp. 67-76.
- Smith, J.F., A. van Gensen and H. Willemsse (eds). *Swart Afrikaanse Skrywers*. Bellville: University of the Western Cape: 1985.
- Sowden, L. *The Kimberley Train*. Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1976.
- Soyinka, W. 'The Fight for Human Existence'. *Post*, 3 June 1962
- Spillus, E.B. (ed.), *Melanie Klein Today* Vol. I. London: Routledge, 1988.
- Squire, J.(ed.), *Grass of Parnassus: An Anthology of Poetry for Schools*. London: Edwin Arnold, 1940.
- Stalin, J. *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1936.
- Stallybrass P. and A. White. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. London: Methuen, 1986.
- Steinbeck, J. *In Dubious Battle*. London: New English Library, 1973.
- *The Grapes of Wrath*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973.

- Steiner, J. 'The interplay between pathological organisations and the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions', in E.B. Spillus (ed.), *Melanie Klein Today* Vol. I., pp. 324-342.
- Stewart, S. *On Longing*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984.
- Stocking, G.W. *Race, Culture and Evolution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.
- Suleiman, S.R. *Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.
- Sullivan, C.C. 'John Steinbeck, war reporter: fiction, journalism and types of truth'. *Journalism History*, 23, 1, 1997, pp. 16-24.
- Summerhayes, D. 'You can say that again: Some encounters with repetition in *In Our Time*'. *Hemingway Review*, 10, 2 (1991), pp. 47-65.
- Suttner, R. and J. Cronin. *30 Years of the Freedom Charter*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985.
- Swanberg, W.A. *Dreiser*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965.
- The South African Pocket Oxford Dictionary of Current English*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Tressell, R. *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. London: Paladin Books, 1991.
- Thom's Survey Map 1898-1918*. Cape Provincial Administration, Town Planning Department.
- Turley, D. 'A Usable Life: Popular Representations of Abraham Lincoln', in D. Ellis (ed.), *Imitating Art: Essays in Biography*, pp. 53-66.
- Trump, M. 'Socialist Explorations in South African Fiction'. *Staffrider*, 7, 1 (1988), pp. 25-31.
- Uspensky, B. *A Poetics of Composition: The Structure of the Artistic Text and Typology of a Compositional Form*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973.
- Unterhalter, E. *Forced Removal*. London: International Defence and Aid Fund, 1987.
- Van de Rheede, I. 'Kaapse Afrikaans: 'n sosio-politieke perspektief', in J.F. Smith et al, *Swart Afrikaanse Skrywers*, pp. 32-36.
- Van der Ross, R.E. *The Rise and Decline of Apartheid*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1968.
- 'A Political and Social History of the Cape Coloured People'. Vol. I. [unpublished typescript], 1973. University of Cape Town Archives, Cape Town.
- Vaughn, E.D. 'In Our Time and Picasso', in K. Rosen (ed.), *Hemingway Repossessed*, pp. 3-8.
- Visser, N. 'Audience and Closure in *The Grapes of Wrath*'. *Studies in American Fiction*, 22, 1 (1994), pp. 19-36.
- Walker, J. (ed.). *Haliwell's Film Guide*. London: Harper Collins, 1991.
- Wannenburgh, A. 'Awendgesang', in R. Rive (ed.), *Quartet*, pp. 23-32.
- Wannenburgh, A. 'Memories of Richard'. *New Contrast*, (no. 71) 18, 4 (1990), pp. 23-39.
- Western, J. *Outcast Cape Town*. Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1981.
- Whitman, S. 'A Story of Resistance'. *African Communist*, No. 77 (1979). p. 113.
- Whittemore, R. *Six Literary Lives: The Shared Impiety of Adams, London, Sinclair, Williams, Dos Passos and Tate*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993.
- Wickins, P.L. *The Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1978.

- Wicomb, Z. 'Postcoloniality and Postmodernity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa'. *AUETSA '96: Conference Proceedings*. Bellville: University of the Western Cape, 1997.
- Wilding, M. *Political Fictions*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980.
- Williams, M.H. and M. Waddell. *The Chamber of Maiden Thought: Literary Origins of the Psychoanalytic Model of the Mind*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Williams, R. 'The Ragged-Arsed Philanthropists', in R. Williams, *Writing in Society*. London: Verso, 1991, pp. 239-256.
- Willemsse, H. 'The Black Afrikaans Writer: A Continuing Dichotomy', in D. Bunn and J. Taylor (eds), *From South Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, pp. 236-246.
- Winberg, C. 'The "Ghoemaliedjies" of the Cape Muslims: Remnants of a slave culture'. [n.d.]; later published as 'Satire, Slavery and the "Ghoemaliedjies" of the Cape Muslims', *New Contrast*, 19, 4 (1991), pp. 78-96.
- Winnicott, D.W. 'Fear of breakdown', in G. Kohon (ed.), *The British School of Psychoanalysis: the Independent Tradition*. London: Free Association Books, 1986, pp. 173-184.
- Witz, L. 'From Langa Market Hall and Rhodes' Estate to the Grand Parade and the Foreshore: Contesting Van Riebeeck's Cape Town'. *Kronos: Journal of Cape History*, 25 (1998), pp. 187-206.
- Wollen, P. *Raiding the Icebox: Reflections on Twentieth-Century Culture*. London: Verso, 1993.
- Yesufu, A.R. 'Mbari Publications: a pioneer Anglophone African publishing house', in H. Zell (ed.), *The African Book Publishing Record VIII*. 2 (1982), pp. 53-57.
- Young, R.J.C. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Youngs, T. 'White apes at the *fin de siècle*', in T. Youngs (ed.), *Writing and Race*. London: Longman, 1997, pp. 166-190.
- Yousaf, N. *Alex La Guma: Politics and Resistance*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2001.
- Ziervogel, C. *Know This - Brown South Africa*. Cape Town: Stewart Publishing Company, 1939.
- , 'Rambles in South African Historical Byways'. *The Liberator*, 1, 1 (1937), pp. 11-12.