

ALEX LA GUMA'S SHORT STORIES IN RELATION TO *A WALK IN THE NIGHT*: A SOCIO-POLITICAL AND LITERARY ANALYSIS

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A minithesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Magister Artium in the Department of English, University of the Western Cape.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title page.....	i
Keywords.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Declaration.....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	vii
CHAPTER ONE: CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE STUDY.....	1
1.1. Introduction.....	1
1.2. Background to the study.....	1
1.3. The research question	1
1.4. The aim of the study.	2
1.5. Methodology	3
1.6. Introduction to La Guma's life	6
1.7. Summary and conclusion	15
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	16
2.1. Introduction.....	16
2.2. The literature review	16
2.3. Summary and conclusion.....	25
CHAPTER THREE: A SOCIO-POLITICAL AND LITERARY ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELLA AND THE ACCOMPANING SHORT STORIES.....	26

3.1.	
Introduction.....	26
3.2. Socio-political analysis.	26
3.2.1. <i>A Walk in the Night</i> and “Tattoo Marks Nails”.....	28
3.2.2. <i>A Walk in the Night</i> and “At Portagee’s”.....	33
3.2.3. <i>A Walk in the Night</i> and “The Gladiators”.....	36
3.2.4. <i>A Walk in the Night</i> and “Blankets”.....	38
3.2.5. <i>A Walk in the Night</i> and “A Matter of Taste”.....	42
3.2.6. <i>A Walk in the Night</i> and “The Lemon Orchard”.....	46
3.2.7. Summary and conclusion.....	48



CHAPTER FOUR: A LITERARY ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELLA AND THE SHORT STORIES:	49
4.1. Introduction.....	49
4.2. Literary analysis and literature.....	49
4.3. Realism.....	50
4.4. Naturalism.....	54
4.4.1. Minute details	54
4.4.2.Environmental determinism.....	58
4.4.3. Pessimism as integral to naturalism.....	61
4.5 Summary and conclusion.....	62
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	63

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....
....65

KEY WORDS

Alex La Guma

South Africa

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20th century

Coloured

Marxism

Politics in literature

Protest literature

Criticism

History



ABSTRACT

The minithesis provides a detailed socio-political and literary analysis of *A Walk in the Night: Seven stories from the streets of Cape Town*. It investigates and systematically compares each short story to the novella or compares the short stories with each other and shows their thematic and formal similarities and differences.

The results of the study will provide a valuable contribution to the study of African literature. It will complete what other critics have left out. No one among La Guma's scholars has analysed the anthology as a single entity; most critics have analysed the novella and have not analysed the accompanying short stories. As a result, the relationships between the novella and the short stories are unknown to many readers. I argue that this needs to be corrected. In order to situate the thesis, the study also presents a selected list of critics who have studied the novella and the short stories, and indicates their achievements and their shortcomings.

The study will be carried out from a Marxist perspective, and will explore the use of realist and naturalist literary styles. Marxism will provide the socio-political and theoretical framework. Naturalism and realism are the two main literary genres that occur in the anthology.

September, 2005

DECLARATION

I declare that *Alex La Guma's short stories in relation to A Walk in the Night: A socio-political and literary analysis* 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.

VINCENT NTAGANIRA

September 2005

SIGNED:



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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

This chapter is a contextualisation of the study. It deals with the background of the topic, specifies the research question and the aims and methodology, and provides an introduction to La Guma's life.

1.2. Background of the study

In his research on the teaching of African literature at Anglophone African Universities, Lindfors points out that "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: Seven stories from the streets of Cape Town* was the most popular" (1989:54-55). Though *A Walk in the Night* and its accompanying six short stories ("Tattoo Marks and Nails", "At the Portagee's", "The Gladiators", "Blankets", "A Matter of Taste" and "The Lemon Orchard") share many features, most critics have only analyzed the novella and ignored the short stories. Abrahams (1985: 22) notes that "many of the short stories on South Africa were written when La Guma was in jail or under house arrest and...reveal in theme the socio-political concerns he experienced then", but goes no further. Chandramohan provides a superficial analysis of some of the short stories but does not venture any general statements, nor does he link them to the novella (1992: 64-66, 70-71, 73-74). None of the critics has carried out a comparative analysis of the anthology as one entity. By doing this, the thesis will break new ground in the study of La Guma's work.

1.3. Research question

The minithesis provides a critical analysis of *A Walk in the Night: Seven stories from the streets of Cape Town*. It asks why no one has analysed the anthology as a whole,

given its significance (Lindfors, 1989:54-55). It investigates and compares the themes found in this anthology of La Guma's early fiction.

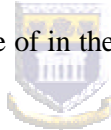
1.4. Aims

I will conduct a close reading, pick out themes that the texts share, and examine the relationship between the novella and the short stories as well as the relationships between the short stories. In so doing, the study will aim to:

- Provide a social analysis of the anthology. Both the novella and the accompanying short stories deal with social themes. In a more general sense, the anthology deals with the theme of apartheid and its ramifications.
- Explore La Guma's thoughts about coloureds at the time when he wrote the texts of the anthology. For example, most of the coloureds in La Guma's work appear to believe that all are evil. In *A Walk in the Night* and "The Lemon Orchard", for instance, white characters are presented as the enemies of coloureds. Another important characteristic of almost all coloured characters in the novella and in all the short stories is the absence of a political consciousness that is mature enough to organise a collective struggle against the oppression of .
- Show that it is important to distinguish between the fact that politics can exist in a piece of literature and the fact that literature can be used to express political protest, and evaluate the effect that each could have. For example, in *A Walk in the Night*, one of the characters makes the capitalist system responsible for the wretched life of the coloureds: "It's the capitalis' system,'

the taxi-driver said, ‘Heard it at a meeting on the Parade. act like that because of the capitalis’ system’” (*Walk*: 17). However, others participating in the conversation do not understand him. In this example, La Guma has placed politics in literature; he has not made a political protest. In other parts of the anthology, La Guma uses literature to protest against injustice; for instance, in “The Lemon Orchard”.

- Explore the literary techniques that La Guma uses in the anthology. La Guma was a Marxist. This means that we might expect him to write in a realist manner. Engels points out that realism “implies, besides truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances” (in Gugelberger, 1985:6). La Guma’s use of realism is linked to naturalism, another style that he makes use of in the anthology.



1.5. Methodology

First, I will use a Marxist approach. Eagleton’s definition of Marxism will be a point of departure in my effort to analyse the anthology from a Marxist perspective. According to Eagleton,

Marxism is a scientific theory of human societies and of the practice of transforming them; and what that means, rather more correctly, is that the narrative Marxism has to deliver is the story of the struggles of men and women to free themselves from certain forms of exploitation and oppression. (1976: vii)

Eagleton’s definition is too general. I will, therefore, narrow it to Belsey’s interpretation, particularly with regard to a Marxist construction of the subject within ideological discourse. In the light of Althusser’s reading of Marx, that “ideology is the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the minds of a man or a social

group (1971:158), Belsey points out that “ideology is both a real and an imaginary relation to the world in that it is the way in which people really live their relationship to the social relations which govern their conditions of existence” (1988:57). The above quotation justifies part of my argument that La Guma considered literature as a weapon in the struggle against apartheid. It also supports Ngugi’s comment that literature “as a creative process and as an end is conditioned by historical social forces and pressures: it cannot elect to stand above or transcend economics, politics, class, race” (Ngugi, 1981:6).

Basing my analysis on the Marxist ideology prevailing in the anthology, I will show that La Guma desired to link the problems of coloureds to class rather than to race issues. However, he knew that many coloureds understood their problems in race terms. Indeed, La Guma was concerned with how coloureds were thinking of themselves in relation to blacks and other coloureds. Most coloureds were convinced that they were inferior to and superior to blacks. According to Erasmus, herself a coloured, “growing up Coloured meant knowing that I was not *only not* white, but *less than white; not only not* black, but better than black” (2001:13). As examples, in “The Gladiators”, Kenny, a coloured, who “was sorry he wasn’t white and glad he wasn’t black” (“Gladiators”, 114), thought that he was superior to his black opponent, Panther. His humiliating words when referring to Panther as “a black bastard”, “sonovabitch”, “a black piece of crap” or “a tsotsi” (“Gladiators”, 115,116,119) prove his conviction.

The use of a Marxist approach will facilitate the explanation of the alienated behaviour of some of the characters. Indeed, alienation as process whereby people

come to be divorced or isolated from the society around them is the only best way to understand the characters' behaviour in the anthology. In the latter, the alienation will be explained as a result of the oppressive apartheid policy. Characters, unable to oppose the system, take drugs, alcohol, become gangsters or opt for other activities which help them to briefly forget their problems. This shows that apartheid determined the actions of characters both in the novella and in the short stories. Determination is an important element in Marxism. Without it, Marxism would make no sense. In fact, as Williams suggests, "Marxism without some concept of determination is in effect worthless" (1977:83). The term *determination*, because of its conceptual and linguistic complexities (in Marxist theory) needs some further clarification. It has at least two meanings. On one hand, it refers to firmness of purpose and, on the other hand, it is used to mean the capacity to make or cause and to set limits to some thing or some process. Though the two meanings seem to be in contradiction, they complement each other. As a Marxist activist, La Guma was determined (in the first meaning) to write about the determination (in the second meaning) of individuals in the anthology.

Second, I will use a socio-political approach. The latter will help us to understand the anthology with regards to the society that gave birth to it. In a more general sense, it will provide a brief context of the socio-political lives of coloureds around the time when the anthology was produced. In turn, this will offer more insights into the understanding of characters and their situations (Lewis, 1987; Jeppie & Soudien, 1990). For example, Lewis (1987), in studying the history of South African coloured political parties introduces notions of coloured history and identity. He explained "that Coloured identity is a white-imposed categorisation" (1987:4), and goes on to say that "they had emerged very early on after the arrival of the first settlers at the

Cape of Good Hope in 1652” (1987:7). He also mentions the Population Registration Act of 1950, which officially defined coloureds as a race.

Finally, I will compare the themes with each other in order to show similarities and differences. In *A Walk in the Night* and “The Lemon Orchard”, for example, La Guma describes in similar ways the fate of coloureds who try to resist ’ injustices. They receive heavy and brutal punishments from. In the novella, Adonis loses his job because of his refusal to blindly follow his white foreman’s instructions, and in the short story, the coloured teacher is presented as a victim of five who are accusing him of challenging their authority.

1.5. Introduction to La Guma’s life

No critic can claim to adequately analyse any of La Guma’s works without understanding his background. Like any human being, La Guma was a product of his past. So were his writings. In fact, his life explains the orientation and meaning of his creative writings. Politics dominated his life. He was born, grew up and died in a political environment. Since his detailed biography is available in different works (Abrahams, 1985; Abrahams, 1991; Chandramohan, 1992; Mkhize, 1998; Field, 2001; Yousaf, 2001; and many others), I will only provide the essentials.

Alex La Guma was a coloured South African who was born on Friday, February 20, 1925 in District Six, in Cape Town. He was brought up in a politically active family. On his father’s side, La Guma was “of Malagasy, Indonesian, German and African stock”, and his mother’s side included “a mixture of Scottish and Indonesian heritage” (Abrahams, 1986:83). At his birth, his father, Jimmy La Guma, “was a trade union organizer and he was working for the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union”

(Abrahams, 1991: 15). Later, Jimmy became a distinguished trade unionist, communist and leader of the South African coloured community. He also held “important positions in a variety of political organisations (Field, 2001:52) in which, due to his “impressive command of written and spoken English” (Field, 2001:52), he edited their publications and wrote articles and letters on their behalf. This would have considerable influence on La Guma’s future political and literary career. The father’s “literary and linguistic abilities provided his son with a model of ‘correct English usage’” (Field, 2001:52). Politically, La Guma’s father was a Leninist. This was revealed to La Guma in his “first political lessons [which] came from his grandmother and his mother who told him that his father was a follower of Lenin” (Field, 2001:40). The initiation began when he wanted to know why his father was seldom at home. He was told that his father was busy in meetings, using Lenin’s teachings to liberate his people. La Guma’s own words are more convincing: “My mother explained that my father was a follower of Lenin; that Lenin had been the leader of the great change in Russia which had done away with poverty so that people no longer need be poor” (in Odendaal and Field, 1993: 169). She added that his father and his comrades were using “the teachings of Lenin to show workers in our country that they could achieve happiness for themselves and their children” (in Odendaal and Field, 1993: 169). In addition, La Guma remembers hearing “discussions on the teachings of Lenin. It was strange and exciting that the ideas of the man on the parlour wall could cause such debate in our country far away from his” (in Odendaal and Field, 1993:169). La Guma, being too young then, could not understand the reasons for his father’s fighting, but as he grew up, he became more aware.

The injustices that La Guma experienced from whites from childhood onwards were another source of his revolutionary ideas. For example, at the age of six or seven, he became a victim of racial discrimination by whites. He describes the circumstances as follows:

...my mother took me to the circus for the first time. Anyway, the circus was on; it was very exciting, and when we were in the big top watching the performance I discovered that I couldn't see anything that was going on in the ring. For some reason or another, the performers were always looking the other way, performing in the other direction. And I asked my mother why this was so and she told me we were sitting in the seats of black people and the main concentration of the circus was on the white audience, so we had to take our chance with the entertainment being provided. (Abrahams, 1991:17)

La Guma was deeply affected by being the victim of racial discrimination. However, that experience enabled him to understand the struggle of his father and the necessity of Lenin's teachings. From that time, like his father, he began to develop revolutionary ideas. He "became a follower of Lenin in his own way" (Field, 2001:44).

He has acknowledged that he was a product of his father: "My father had a great deal to do with moulding my philosophical and political outlook and guiding me towards serious works, both political and cultural" (Abrahams, 1991:18). This should not come as a surprise. All children, in their formative years, are influenced by their parents. In the case of La Guma, since his father was very prominent and politically motivated, it was expected that sooner or later he would become part of his father's fight. This also might explain La Guma's Marxist convictions. For instance, in 1938, when "the world went to war against Fascist Germany"


(Abrahams, 1985:6), his father's influence was already clear. La Guma offered to join the International Brigade against fascism in Spain, and in 1940, he wanted to serve in World War II, just as his father "served in the Cape Corps in Abyssinia and Egypt" (Abrahams, 1985:6), but "both offers were promptly refused due to a combination of his age and build (Odendaal and Field, 1993: viii). In 1942, when he reached matriculation, "he decided to leave school" (Abrahams, 1985:6). As explained above, he was "more interested in the cataclysmic political events that were sweeping Europe in the later 1930's than he was in the routine affairs of school" (Abrahams, 1986:83). He would complete his matriculation exams in 1945.

La Guma's decision was a result of his Marxist convictions and his commitment to fighting racism internationally. It also demonstrated his "consciousness of world history and its political dynamics" (Mkhize, 1988:13). His openness to Marxist ideas was also seen by his fellow workers in the factory where he worked between 1944 and 1946:

My fellow-workers listened with a certain curiosity to my talks relating the manufacture of metal containers for soldiers to the struggle against fascism, oppression, exploitation. I was described as 'a communist', and elected to the factory trade-union committee. (Abrahams, 1991:35)

The latter organised a strike over low wages and poor working conditions. This was La Guma's first experience of a strike, and he considered it "the beginning of his contact with ordinary labourers" (Abrahams, 1986:84). Because of his active participation in the strike, he "lost his job at the factory" (Abrahams, 1985:6). He lost his job, but he acquired strong experience.

In 1945, he worked as a bookkeeper and then as a clerk at the art department of the Caltex oil company in Cape Town. While working at Caltex, “he took a correspondence course in journalism” (Abrahams, 1991:7). This course would contribute a lot to his political and writing career, which will be discussed in chapters three and four.

From 1947 until his death, La Guma was a politically committed activist. In 1947, he joined the Young Communist League, and in the same year, he became a member of District 20 of the Communist Party. He was interested in the “antiracist struggle of the day” (Abrahams, 1985:6). This interest in class struggle would later appear in his creative writings, as I shall explain in chapter three. In the following year, he became a member of the  Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA). “With the banning of the CPSA in 1950, under the Suppression of Communism Act, he became a listed communist” (Adhikari, 1997:7). In 1953, he joined the South Africa Coloured People’s Organisation (SACPO). After one year, he became one of its executive members. In 1955, La Guma “became a chairman of the organization”, and in the same year, “he was chosen as one of the organizers of SACPO for Congress of the People, which was held in Kliptown, Johannesburg, in June 1955” (Abrahams, 1985:7). The Congress of the People was the product of the Congress Alliance, which consisted of the African National Congress, the South African Coloured People’s Organisation, the South African Indian Congress and the White Congress of Democrats. It was led by the ANC because the ANC was the largest congress and it represented the most oppressed group of South Africans. The Congress of the People “was convened to solidify the work of all

antiracist groups and to unify them under the banner of the African National Congress of South Africa” (Abrahams, 1985:7). At the end of the Congress, on June 27, 1955, the Freedom Charter was drawn up. The latter was a document which stated that

South Africa belonged to all of its inhabitants, black or white, and demanded a non racial, democratic system of government, equal protection for all the groups before the law, nationalisation of all the banks, mines and heavy industry, land redistribution, equal work and educational opportunities and the removal of restrictions on domestic and family life. (Lewis, 1987:263)

Though La Guma had contributed significantly to the drafting of the Freedom Charter, and though he was leading “a large Cape Province contingent”, he could not reach Kliptown. As he said, “I myself didn’t reach the Congress of the People because we were stopped on the way and held until it was over” (Abrahams, 1991:24). They were stopped at Beaufort West in the Cape by the police. Six months later, on 13 December, 1956, he was one of the original 156 antiracist leaders who were arrested and charged with treason against the state. Two main reasons led to his arrest. First, he was a leader of the coloured community and, on the other hand, he was one of the signatories of the Freedom Charter. In 1960, the prosecution failed to prove the existence of a conspiracy against the accused. They were then acquitted. La Guma was “one of the last to be found non guilty” (*The Cape Times*, 25 August, 1962). The period around the Treason Trial was not a complete waste of time for La Guma. He used it to begin his writing career.

In 1955, at the request of New Age, “the unofficial mouthpiece of the ANC and its allies” (Odendaal and Field, 1993:ix), La Guma “touched on literature for the

first time” (Abrahams, 1991:19). He joined the staff of the newspaper in Cape Town. Earlier, we learned that La Guma had studied journalism by correspondence in 1945. Thus, he had the appropriate skills to do the job. Before joining New Age, he had produced “a couple of pieces for the old Guardian” (Abrahams, 1991:19), where he had demonstrated “his competence as a writer” (Abrahams, 1985:10). He had also written for the magazine Fighting Talk and for Africa South, and had submitted a story to Drum magazine. He used his writings to help people understand what was happening in their country, and how things should change. His journalistic experience at New Age newspaper is evidence of his determination to become a freedom fighter and helped him to improve further his writing skills. This experience started his long journey to becoming one of South Africa’s best writers. La Guma’ experience at New Age enabled him to become an excellent cartoonist, with his “Little Libby - The Adventures of Liberation Chabalala”. This was a weekly cartoon that “incorporated political issues of the time and drew on La Guma’s observations of life in Johannesburg during the Treason Trial” (Odendaal and Field, 1993:61). All the series of this cartoon are available in *Liberation Chabalala: The World of Alex la Guma* (Odendaal and Field, 1993:62-98).

In the eyes of the apartheid regime, not surprisingly, La Guma’s political activism and leftist writings were considered as a threat. The apartheid government responded then to “La Guma’s increasing prominence in anti-apartheid politics by systematically harassing and isolating him” (JanMohamed, 1983:226). In summary, in the periods that followed his being charged with treason, he was “shot at, detained for months without trial, held in solitary confinement, banned,

prohibited from circulating any of his writing, placed under house arrest for 24 hours a day and finally forced into exile”(Odendaal and Field, 1993: iii).

La Guma left South Africa for London in 1966 “on an exit permit with his family” (Adhikari, 1997:8). He decided to go into exile because, as he revealed in an interview with Abrahams,

it was felt that after having spent four years under house arrest and going into the fifth year with the prospect of another five years, there was no point in remaining locked up in one’s home indefinitely, one could be more constructive outside. (Abrahams, 1991:25)

La Guma was right in saying this. In a political and literary sense, he became more productive in exile than he had been in South Africa. This was so mainly because “his recent arrival from South Africa provided him with celebrated status and he was in demand in many circles...his reputation...was enhanced when *The Stone Country* appeared in London in 1967” (Abrahams, 1985:17). Before this novel, he had already published two other novels, *A Walk in the Night* (1962) and *And a Threefold Cord* (1964), “as well as several short stories all of which were published abroad because he was banned” (Adhikari, 1997:8). His last novels were *In the Fog of the Season’s End* (1972) and *The Time of the Butcherbird* (1979).

La Guma and his family spent twelve years in London. During this period, he “continued with his political work addressing anti-apartheid gatherings” (Mkhize, 1988:21). In order to survive, he worked as “insurance clerk, journalist and radio scriptwriter” (Adhikari, 1997:8). In 1978, he was appointed the ANC’s chief representative for the Caribbean and Central and Latin America. His base was in

Cuba. As a convinced Marxist, La Guma was very happy to live in a socialist country. He revealed this in an interview with Abrahams shortly before his death in Cuba: “Obviously it is a relief to live in a free atmosphere and in a socialist country after the tensions of South Africa and the insecurity of Western Europe” (Abrahams, 1991:40).

La Guma died in Havana, Cuba on Friday, 11 October, 1985. Like his father, he died of a heart attack He was 60 years old. At the time of his death, he was writing another novel, which he entitled *The Crowns of Battle* or *Zone of Fire*. “He was also going to write his autobiography. And he was going to write a book on Cuba” (Chandramohan, 1992:194).

La Guma’s contribution to English literature and his tireless political struggle “for freedom and justice in South Africa” (Abrahams, 1991:5) were crowned by recognition from different parts of the world. In summary,

In his last year several countries honoured his creative and political work. The Soviet Presidium awarded La Guma the Order of Friendship; the Republic of Congo gave him the President Ngwuesso Literary prize; the French Ministry of Culture awarded him the much coveted title of ‘Chevalier des Arts et Lettres’; and the Soviet Writers Union set aside a special evening to pay tribute to him and celebrate the publication of a half million copies of his collected works. (Abrahams, 1991:vi)

In summary, La Guma has died, but due to the importance of his contribution to the freedom struggle, he is still alive. Dennis Brutus correctly points out that “by living in the minds of others, we achieve immortality” (Abrahams, 1991:3).

1.6. Summary and conclusion

In this chapter, I provide the motivation for the present minithesis, define the research problem, present the three main aims, describe the methodology that I will use to achieve my research aims, and finally, give a brief introduction to La Guma's life. The next chapter will deal with the literature review.



CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

The second chapter deals with critical literature around the topic and the theoretical framework. It presents a selected list of critics who have analysed the novella and the short stories, their achievements and shortcomings. Its main aim is to give the basis for the development of the minithesis.

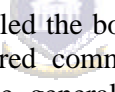
2.2. The literature review

“By reviewing the literature and examining other research studies in the same field, the researchers will be able to decide on the details of the research topic, making it more specific and focused” (Seliger and Shohamy, 1989:67). This is what I will try to achieve in this section. However, as mentioned earlier, there are no specific critical texts on the anthology as a whole. All critics have analysed the novella and the short stories separately. Almost all the critics have analysed the novella; few have been interested in the short stories. Nevertheless, what those critics have found out cannot be ignored. Their findings are a useful contribution to any scholar who would like to understand La Guma’s *A Walk in the Night: Seven Stories from the Streets of Cape Town*. Thus, a close understanding of the novella and the short stories in the light of what different critics have found out will guide and illuminate my analysis.

A Walk in the Night is La Guma’s first work of long prose fiction. It is part of his “transition from journalism to fiction” (Field, 2001:243). Because of its shortness, many critics refer to it as a novella. Mbari, an important African publishing house, published it in Nigeria in 1962. Its first edition had 91 pages and Peter Clarke, the

artist and writer, designed its cover. La Guma began to write it 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” (Field, 2001:226). Characters, as described in the novella, are victims of the apartheid regime. The novella “brought information in literary form about the injustices of apartheid to a wider audience” (Field, 2001: 233). In other words, it introduces politics into a work of art and shows the compatibility of the two. Indeed, a politician can use literature to express his views.

The characters, as the title may reveal, symbolise people walking in the darkness of apartheid injustice. Due to limited political commitment, they do not know how to organise a struggle for freedom. La Guma summarises this as follows:



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. They were walking, enduring and in this way they were experiencing this walking in the night until such time as they found themselves and were prepared to be citizens of a society to which they wanted to make a contribution. 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. (Abrahams, 1985:49)

La Guma wrote the novella as part of his contribution to ending apartheid injustices. His purpose, as stated in the above quotation, was to open the minds of his community so that they could see exactly why they were oppressed, and what they had to do to become free. However, there is no evidence of the readership and reception of La Guma’s *A Walk in the Night* by his community.

Breidlid (2002:15) points out that “*A Walk in the Night* was a way of restoring a voice which had always been suppressed by the apartheid government”. In his analysis, he attaches much importance to the historical and political factors around the time when the novella was produced. In analysing characters, Breidlid confirms “the positional superiority of the (as the representatives of the apartheid regime) over the positional inferiority of the non-” (2002:143) and attributes that situation to the apartheid policy. To substantiate his claim, he gives the example of the two white policemen who unjustly hunted and caused the death of the innocent coloured man, Willieboy, “for the perceived murder of Doughty, the old White man inhabiting District Six” (Breidlid, 2002: 143). Normally, the proper obligation of the police is to protect people and their property. However, in apartheid South Africa, it was not the case. Instead of honouring their proper obligation, they (the police) behaved as oppressors. Indeed, according to La Guma, “in South Africa we live with the police, I believe. Black people are continually being harassed by the police...So that when one is concerned with social situations one can’t leave out the police” (Abrahams, 1991:23). It is this racially based fear that Michel Adonis (in *A Walk in the Night*) experiences when he meets the police on his way back home. For him, it was not a pleasant experience:

They came on and Michael Adonis turned aside to avoid them, but they had him penned in with a casual, easy, skilful flanking manoeuvre before he could escape...

....‘Where are you walking around man?’ ...

‘Going home’, Michael Adonis said, looking at the buckle of this policeman’s belt. You learned from experience to gaze at some spot on their uniforms, the button of a pocket, or the bright smoothness of their Sam Browne belts, but never into their eyes, for that would be taken as an affront by them. It was only the very brave, or the very stupid, who dared look straight into the law’s eyes, to challenge them or to question their authority. (*Walk*, 11)

Adonis does not look the police in the eye for two contradictory but meaningful reasons: to do so would challenge them, and to avoid their gaze is to reduce their power. As in the army, where one is not supposed to look one's superior officer in the eye, under apartheid "rules", the oppressed were not allowed to look at their oppressors. A further analysis of Adonis's refusal, as Yousaf correctly points out, might "be read as a denial of the ir own very existence" (2001:31). Adonis's decision to consider the police as negative forces was justified by the fact that the law in South Africa at the time did not "represent the clichéd concepts of truth, honesty and justice.... The police in *A Walk in the Night* are not interested in the safety or well-being of their black constituency..." (Yousaf, 2001:33).

Assessing the reaction of coloured characters to the ' injustices, Breidlid points out that they "seem both unconscious of the outer world of political strife and conflict and the political mechanisms which govern their day-to-day existence" (Breidlid, 2002: 165). In other words, Breidlid reveals the lack of political maturity among coloureds to organise resistance against white oppression.

Similarly to Breidlid's analysis, Yousaf, in his *Alex la Guma: Politics and Resistance* (2001), suggests that the novella is about the problems of limited political understanding. He goes further and uses Marxist theories to understand the novella. He claims that, "writing from a Marxist perspective, La Guma exemplifies the macrocosmic capitalist-sponsored apartheid state's ill treatment of its majority population in microcosmic detail in his first novel" (Yousaf, 2001:25). Making a general comment on the presence of ideas and resistance in La Guma's novels,

Yousaf points out that La Guma “develops a range of overarching themes introduced in an opening chapter that explores issues of writing and resistance in the context of apartheid South Africa” (in Adhikari, 2002:527).

Another critic who has made a valuable contribution to the understanding of *A Walk in the Night* is Fritz Pointer. In his *A Passion to Liberate, La Guma's South Africa - Images of District Six* (2001), he analyses the themes and literary techniques of the novella. In his analysis, he stresses the use of imagery. “The images are firmly attached to the dominant themes of the book and play a dynamic part in conveying its meaning and deepening its artistic effect” (Pointer, 2001:8). Pointer contributes to the understanding of La Guma’s style, particularly where he says that “when he [La Guma] is not using similes, he is using other figures of speech, the most common being metaphor and personification [and ellipsis]” (Pointer, 2001:26).



In his “Alex La Guma: A Literary and Political Biography of the South African Years” (2001), Field analyses *A Walk in the Night* in the light of political and literary approaches. His analysis is based on an understanding of the circumstances under which La Guma wrote *A Walk in the Night*. He clearly explains how historico-political and socio-economical influences inspired the author of the anthology. His analysis presents La Guma in his infancy, childhood and adulthood. His research describes La Guma as a product of the society in which he grew up. His analytical understanding is based on demonstrating how coloured people, La Guma’s community, were victims of apartheid. He explains how La Guma wanted them to become conscious of the socio-economic and political issues in which they were forced to live. His analysis clarifies La Guma’s main themes: race, social injustice and

resistance to apartheid. But, more importantly, his ideas about the ending of *A Walk in the Night* will be used to explain the presence of realism in the novella.

Mkhize (1998) argues that *A Walk in the Night* describes the social problems which coloured people were forced to face due to the apartheid system. Much stress is placed on the influences of critical realism in the novella. His research was specifically linked to La Guma's longer fiction. He argues that in all his novels, only *A Walk in the Night* is written "with a predominantly critical realist tradition" (Mkhize, 1998:35), and goes on to say that the novella is naturalistic in style but critical realist in perspective (Mkhize, 1998:35).

Chandramohan (1992) expands on this point when he suggests that "La Guma's realism is a bit like the naturalism of American novelists" (1992:95). He summarises La Guma's use of naturalism in the novella by arguing

...that there are parallels between La Guma's narrative style and that of Emile Zola, both of whom focus on minute details in their descriptive passages; that there are parallels between La Guma and the American Naturalists Frank Norris, James Farrell and Theodore Dreiser in articulating the idea of environmental determinism; and that La Guma shares the pessimism integral to naturalism in that his characters are crushed by the forces of their social environment. (Chandramohan, 1992: 31-32)

A critical assessment of these notions will provide a comprehensive analysis of the novella. To understand correctly the influence of American naturalists on La Guma, it is necessary to consider JanMohamed's claim that La Guma's "novels verge on [a] naturalism similar to that of Norris and Dreiser: often his heroes are entirely at the

mercy of an authoritarian society and an oppressive environment” (JanMohamed, 1983:229).

Balutansky is another critic whose analysis will contribute to my study. She placed the novella “at the center of South African racial tragedy”, basing her judgement on the consequences of apartheid on the blacks’ life (Balutansky, 1989). She borrows Soyinka’s words to describe La Guma’s belief in the inseparability of art and social issues: “The artist has always functioned in African society as the record of the mores and experiences of society and as a voice of vision in his own time” (in Balutansky, 1989:1). To Balutansky, *A Walk in the Night* is seen as “a largely naturalistic story in which the tragic fate of the characters is predetermined by the oppressive environment created by Apartheid.” (Balutansky, 1989:14).



Cecil Abrahams, La Guma’s “official biographer”, has also made an important contribution to the understanding of the novella. Abrahams correctly points out that the novella “concerns itself with the social, economic, and political purpose of the Cape colored community...” (1985:49). According to him, La Guma has the “ability to portray character...he is a master at observation, and he does not fail to notice every line of physique and every aspect of clothing and posture that a character may indulge in” (Abrahams, 1985:67). Abrahams further presents the novella as “a slow-moving book which examines carefully every aspect of the major characters’ lives and their cruel environment” (1986:87). I partly agree with Abrahams’ claim. It is true that the novella deals with the social lives of characters, but it is wrong to consider the novella as “slow moving”. It moves fast. In a single night, different events take place and one event rapidly succeeds another.

Barnett (1983) has opened new grounds in the understanding of *A Walk in the Night*. Basing her analysis on Marxist theories, she explains that “[a]lthough La Guma does not believe in thinking in colour, he makes it clear in his fiction that the conflict is not identical with the class struggle” (1983: 132). In other words, La Guma was not only concerned with class struggle; other factors such as race consciousness and the assumption of a racial hierarchy were part of the political context in which La Guma worked politically. These feature in the anthology. To justify her claim, Barnett uses the example of Doughty, the drunken old white former actor, who considers himself as much a member of the oppressed as Michael Adonis. Barnett goes into the history of South Africa and particularly into the history of coloureds, and explains why La Guma thinks so. She recalls the influence of the South African Communist Party that La Guma joined when he was young and concludes that, “he [La Guma] has not abandoned his Marxism” (Barnett, 1983: 132).

As far as the short stories are concerned, “Tattoo Marks and Nails”, “At the Portagee’s” and “Blankets” first appeared in *Black Orpheus* in 1964; “The Gladiators”, “A Matter of Taste” and “The Lemon Orchard” were first published in 1967 with the Heinemann edition of the novella. The review of literature on the short stories will be brief. As mentioned earlier, few critics have been interested in La Guma’s short stories, and no critic has looked at the anthology as a whole.

Barnett (1983) considers the short stories in the novella as La Guma’s “best” stories but does not explain her claim. Her contribution is limited to a brief comparison of “The Gladiators”, “The Lemon Orchard” and “Tattoo Marks and

Nails” with some of Richard Rive’s stories. She suggests that La Guma’s stories tend to be more realistic, direct, and more detailed than those of Rive, but fails to refer to realism and naturalism in order to elaborate her analysis.

In analysing the short stories, Abrahams (1985) begins with an important observation that “La Guma does not make a distinction between writing a short story and writing a novel” (1985:21), but he fails to link the stories to *A Walk in the Night*.

With the exception of “A Matter of Taste”, Chandramohan (1992) analyses the other five short stories accompanying the novella. Chandramohan does not deal with supporting themes, nor does he discuss relationships between the novella and the short stories.



Field (2001) gives the order in which La Guma wrote the short stories and provides a critical analysis of each story, but not in relation to the novella. The emphasis of his analysis falls on La Guma’s narrative techniques in the short stories. In addition, he mentions that “Tattoo Marks and Nails”, “At the Portagee’s” and “Blankets” share features with *A Walk in the Night* but does not analyse those common features in detail. My contribution will be to study the anthology as a single entity. This is very important because the anthology is La Guma’s most widely read work.

In his article, “The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa” (1986), Ndebele is deeply critical of La Guma’s short stories. He says that they rely too much on exaggerated drama and spectacle. Using the “Coffee for the Road”, Ndebele suggests 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” (1986:156). In my thesis, I will suggest that he is wrong. I shall use the story “The Gladiators” to challenge him. Trump (1988) analyses “A Matter of Taste” as socialist literature. He argues that La Guma “manages to avoid some of the rather rigid determinisms of Marxist class analysis” (1988:29). However, Trump does not explain its thematic links with La Guma’s other short stories.

2.3. Summary and conclusion

In this chapter, my aim was to review what La Guma scholarship has found out about the anthology. In different but complementary ways, most of the critics are of the same opinion that the novella was written from a Marxist perspective which uses realism and naturalism. However, no one has tried to compare the novella and the short stories as a single entity. In the next chapter, I will tackle that neglected field. In so the same time I will try to show the essential connection between a Marxist perspective and the modes of realism and naturalism.

CHAPTER THREE: A SOCIO-POLITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELLA AND THE ACCOMPANYING SHORT STORIES

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will provide a detailed socio-political analysis of the novella and the short stories. The two analyses (social and political) are linked because it would be impossible to differentiate one from the other. In the anthology, apartheid and its socio-political consequences influence and dominate the lives of characters. This is because “La Guma clearly sees the South African situation as being wholly conditioned by its social and political problems” (Chapman, 1996:297).

3.2. Social and political analysis

A close reading of *A Walk in the Night* and the accompanying short stories offers insight into the social and political lives of coloureds in general and that of characters in late 1950s and early 1960s, period during which the short stories and the novella were written. The later period was characterised by the domination of apartheid policy in all corners of lives.

The origin of Apartheid has a long history in South Africa. Though it (Apartheid) is not the same as the many varying forms of segregation that may be encountered in cross-cultural and hegemonic, one can say that different forms of segregations which the country experienced since early 1900s had contributed a lot to the birth of Apartheid. Indeed, there has always been some forms of racial segregation and domination in South Africa from the earliest colonial encounters; the British colonies and Boer republics also implemented policies of segregation; the national governments between 1910 and 1948 continued and extended this policy. When the

National Party won the 1948 election, it refined this policy and made it more systematic. Apartheid, as official policy that ended in early 1990, grouped South Africans into four main “races”: Africans, coloureds, indians and . . . mainly used the term “race” as a social construct to control the colonised or those who provided cheap labour, and there were no objective differences between classified people. However, it is virtually impossible to discuss South African literature without using these different categories. Officially, the four “races”, as mentioned above, were named so by the 1950 Population Registration Act, one of the “most important laws forming the framework of apartheid” (Lewis, 1987:261). All these groups are mentioned in the anthology: Coloureds come in the first position, not because they are the most important but because La Guma refers to them more than to any other; follow, then africans, and the indians come in the last position. There is an explanation for this. As La Guma explains that the coloured community was the main focus of his works:



Having read South African literature, I have discovered that nothing satisfactory or worthwhile from my point of view had been written about the area from which I sprang. So I think there was a conscious effort on my part to place on record the life in the poor areas, working class areas, and perhaps for that reason most of my work is centered around that community. (Abrahams, 1991:19)

La Guma could not achieve his aim without mentioning the relationship between coloureds and other races, mainly and sometimes africans. The controlled political, economical and social relations. determined the life of coloureds and other races (Africans and Asians). Calhoun describes white-coloured relations as a master-slave relationship in which the master “exercises complete control over the slaves” (Calhoun et al., 1997:213). In their relations with coloureds, behaved in selfish and egocentric ways like the so-called “civilised man” that Ursula Le Guin describes:

I am Self, I am Master, all the rest is Other-outside, below, underneath, subservient. I own, I use, I explore, I exploit, I control. What I do is what matters. What I want is what matters. I am that I am, and the rest is women and wilderness, to be used as I see fit. (Plumwood (1993:141)

Le Guin's description summarises the behaviour of during the time of apartheid. considered themselves as superior and treated coloureds as inferior. They () treated them (coloureds) in dehumanising, humiliating, frustrating and alienating ways. The policy of apartheid, as explained earlier, allowed to treat other races as they wished. Different examples, both in the novella and in the short stories, will be used as illustrations.

3.2.1. *A Walk in the Night* and "Tattoo Marks and Nails"

Socially and politically, *A Walk in the Night* and "Tattoo Marks and Nails" develop similar themes. Throughout the short story and the novella, the theme of injustice is dominant. In *A Walk in the Night*, it is found at the very beginning in the conversation between Michael Adonis and Willieboy:

'Strolling again. Got pushed out of my job at the facktry.'

'How come then?'

'Answered back to a effing white rooker. Foreman'.

'Those . What happened?'

'That white bastard was lucky I didn't pull him up good. He has been asking for it a long time. Every time a man goes to piss house he starts moaning. Jesus Christ, the way he went on you'd think a man had to wet his pants rather than take a minute off. Well, he picked on me for going for a leak and I told him to go to hell. (*Walk*, 4)

Michael Adonis lost his job at the factory because he took time to urinate. The white man who was his supervisor did not want him to go to the toilet because he thought it was a waste of time. He was interested in Adonis's work but not in his life. A further analysis of Adonis's foreman's behaviour might symbolise the general injustices that characterised white-coloured relations. considered coloureds as creatures without the needs and emotions they themselves experienced.

An illustration of white injustice is also found at the beginning of "Tattoo Marks and Nails". La Guma introduces it in the following example:

The heat in the cell was solid. It was usually hot in the cells, what with over one hundred prisoners packed in, lying on the concrete floor like sardines in a can or tangled like macaroni. But it was the middle of summer, and a week-end when prisoners are locked up early in the day until the following morning, there being only a skeleton of guards on duty; it was doubly, perhaps trebly hotter than usual. ("Tattoo", 97)

La Guma reveals the inhuman conditions under which coloured prisoners were held. Two main observations emerge. First, the prison was overcrowded and asphyxiation could cause deaths among prisoners at any time. This is a violation of the prisoners' rights. Despite imprisonment, prisoners still retain some basic human rights such as respect for their bodily integrity. Second, the limited number of prison guards during the weekend is another indication that considered coloureds as creatures of lesser value. Only their 'white' interests mattered. Taking care of the coloured prisoners was not their preoccupation.

In addition to describing the injustice inflicted by on coloureds, the story introduces an unexpected injustice. It reveals that coloured-coloured relations were not always

perfect. This is surprising since coloureds, like all victims of the apartheid regime, could be expected to show solidarity with each other in all situations. In La Guma's words, coloured-coloured injustice could be even worse than that of the towards coloureds:

A common occurrence in prisons was the 'trial', by the most brutalized inmates, of some unfortunate who might have raised their ire by bootlicking a guard, or was rightly or wrongly accused of giving evidence against, squealing on, his fellow prisoners, or having annoyed them in some other way. Mock courts, much more dangerous than real ones, were held in the cell and 'sentence' meted out. ("Tattoo", 99)

Elsewhere, La Guma explains why the "trials" held by prisoners themselves were the most feared. They were conducted by "men who have graduated from the violent college of the underworld, murderers, gangsters, vicious desperadoes" (Odendaal and Field, 1993:18). In these trials, "the weak were doomed to an existence of terror and depravity" (Odendaal and Field, 1993:18). Second, it shows that the then South African society was a society living under primitive laws. The apartheid government held prisoners in bad and inhumane conditions. According to La Guma, "a society based on suppression, violence, armed force, poverty and unemployment creates violence, bloodshed, gangsterism and murder" (Odendaal and Field, 1993:52). Indeed, prisoners in the story were "petty thieves, gangsters, murderers, rapists, burglars, drunks, brawlers and dope peddlers" ("Tattoo", 98). By being brutalised every day, some coloureds had finally ended up adopting the ' weapon of violence in their daily lives.

A typical example of how a victim of white supremacy could brutalise, in his turn, his comrades is found in the behaviour of a character known as "The Creature". He

suspected, without evidence, a fellow inmate of having killed his brother, Nails. Here is how “The Creature” accuses his victim: “... Couldn’t say his name before he died...But that he had a dragon picked out on his chest, pally...a dragon. Right? ...Maybe like the one *you* got” (“Tattoo”, 101). After voicing these suspicions, “The Creature” and his gang unjustly threaten and terrorise the inmate, “Turk, my boys can hold you while we pull off the shirt” (“Tattoo”, 106).

The injustice inflicted on each other by the victims of white injustice can also be found in *A Walk in the Night*. Michael Adonis, one of the novella’s main characters, kills Doughty, another victim of apartheid. Doughty is an old white man. His racial identity is of great significance for two main reasons. First, it shows the extent to which coloureds hated , even if the latter were oppressed like them. This was so because, as mentioned earlier (Chapter 1.4), in their eyes, all were considered evil. Adonis kills Doughty out of revenge. It has to be remembered that he had unjustly lost his job at the factory the same day, and that a white man was responsible. According to Pointer, “this individual act of violence is therapeutic ... It frees Michael from his inferiority complex and from his confusion and inaction” (Pointer, 2001:19). Indeed, after killing Doughty, Adonis

was suddenly pleased and proud of his own predicament. He felt as if he was the only man who had ever killed another and thought himself a curiosity at which people should wonder [...] It was just something that, to himself, placed him above others, like a poor beggar who suddenly found himself the heir to vast riches. (*Walk*, 66)

Second, contrary to what many people might think, the death of Doughty proves that apartheid was an evil system even for some. The narrator's description of Doughty's achievements during his youth makes this point:

This old man, who was an Irishman and who was dying of alcoholism, diabetes and old age, had once been an actor. He had performed in the theatres of Great Britain, South Africa and Australia, and had served in two wars. Now he was a deserted, abandoned ruin, destroyed by alcohol, waiting for death...(*Walk*, 24-25)

Normally, given Doughty's contribution to his society and in consideration of his status as a white, in accordance with apartheid logic, one would have expected the apartheid government to take care of him. However, this did not happen. According to the above quotation, Doughty is a forgotten person. Physically, he is alive, but psychologically he has already died. Death can be physical or psychological. The latter can be the most dangerous one since its victims feel and live with it for a long time. This type of death is also present in "Tattoo Marks and Nails". The prisoner who was eventually killed by the cell boss and his gang after they had accused him of complaining "of them to a guard, an unforgivable offence" ("Tattoo", 99) first experienced that type of death, because "the terrified man died a hundred times over before he died physically as "a blanket was pressed over his head and face, and a half-dozen knives driven through the one in which he slept" ("Tattoo", 99).

The last common social element between the novella and the short story concerns religious belief. The latter influences social values in many ways. In the history of human kind, religious convictions have played an important role in the daily lives of people. Two religions are mentioned in the novella and in the story: Christianity and

Islam. Both religions present God/Allah as the omnipotent creator of the world. While *A Walk in the Night* refers to Christianity, “Tattoo Marks and Nails” presents Islam. The latter is presented in two ways. First, it is through the word *Wallahi*. For example: “‘Ja’, replied Ahmed the Turk. ‘Wallahi. Truly’” (“Tattoo”, 98). *Wallahi* refers to Allah, the Islamic name for God. Ahmed uses the name of God to show that he is not telling lies. In most languages, people use words related to God as proof that they are telling the truth. They do this so that they may have God as their witness, because of the respect they owe to God for his power to see what is hidden in people’s minds. Second, names such as Ahmed and Huseni, which appear in the story, indicate the presence of Islam among the coloured community, because the two names are associated with that religion.

3.2.2. *A Walk in the Night* and “At the Portagee’s”

The story “At Portagee’s” deals with two main themes: poverty and sexual relations between men and women. The two themes are found in *A Walk in the Night* and they are presented in almost identical ways.

The theme of sexual relations between men and women dominates the story. This story is centred on two coloured men, the narrator and Banjo (Banjo’s true name is Edward Isaacs) and two coloured women, Hilda and Dolores. The former are trying to pick up the latter.

“‘Hullo,’ I said. ‘Can we sit here?’... ‘Well, it’s not our café, and there’s no reserved seats.’ ‘Thanks, miss’” (“Portagee’s”, 110). They then began a sexual game: “I [the narrator] put a hand under the table and on Hilda’s thigh. She didn’t move or say anything and I kept my hand there, feeling the long, smooth curved flesh under the

dress” (“Portagee’s”, 113). The conversation progresses smoothly and, at the end, in response to the men’s proposition, the women agree to meet at the “Emperor”.

In addition to the sexual theme, “At the Portagee’s” and the novella develop the theme of poverty. This theme of poverty is La Guma’s main message to his readers. An example of how the theme is presented in “At the Portagee’s” is an incident in which a poor coloured man enters the restaurant in which the narrator, Banjo, and the women are sitting. He asks the narrator for sixpence, “Say, old pal, spare a sixpence for a bite man” (“Portagee’s,” 109), and receives it. Tired and hungry, the poor man sits down at one of the tables and orders a sixpence worth of fish. The Portuguese restaurateur rudely refuses to take his order, “You can’t get sixpence food here, you bladdy fool” (“Portagee’s”, 111). The man insists, but the restaurateur is determined to reject his order, “Get out you loafer” (“Portagee’s”, 111), says the ‘Portagee’, when throwing the poor man out of the restaurant. Instead of manifesting sympathy, “[s]ome people in the place laughed” (“Portagee’s”, 111) and the ‘Portagee’ goes on with his business. This story describes a society in which poor people have no place. The man was thrown out because he was poor, “It is not colour or ethnicity, but cash nexus that leads to the poor man’s humiliation” (Chandramohan, 1992:71). Bearing in mind the influence of Marxism on La Guma, one can point out that La Guma’s description of the incident was his way of criticising the capitalist system, which he accused of supporting apartheid, as I will explain in the next paragraph.

La Guma makes the same accusations in *A Walk in the Night*. He criticises the capitalist system when he introduces the taxi driver’s explanations of why coloureds were living in poor conditions. In Chapter 1.4, he mentions the taxi-driver’s words. In

a Marxist context, the taxi-driver's interpretation of capitalism might indirectly symbolise "an explicit reference to the need for organized mass action against the [apartheid] political regime..." (Yousaf, 2001: 34). Capitalism has contributed to racial prejudice in South Africa. Abrahams suggests that "...racism is a phenomenon of capitalism and did not exist as a social phenomenon before the advent of this system" (1991:58). Abrahams is partly right and partly wrong. It is true that no one would question capitalism's contribution to racial prejudice, but it is wrong to ignore that there were racial divisions and forms of racial oppression such as slavery in the pre-capitalist world, and in pre-capitalist South Africa in particular. Indeed, capitalism and its forms of segregation and racial hegemony emerged strongly in the Western world from the early century, particularly with the Dutch sea-borne trading empire which brought the first permanent colonial settlement in the Cape.



Coming to the theme of poverty in the novella, as in the story "At the Portagee's", La Guma links it to money. The conversation between Willieboy and Miss Gipsy illustrates this theme: "...You think that I'm here to support all you bum hangers? ...I'll mos pay you soon as I get money.' 'Soon as you get money? You mean [as] soon as you rob somebody again?'" (Walk, 50). Rude as the character, the 'Portagee' is, Gipsy shows no interest in Willieboy because he is poor. Gipsy's concern is directed towards the three seamen, two and one swarthy, who had money. Gipsy's lack of interest in Willieboy is made clear when the latter complains. He is not happy about the way in which the seamen from the States are behaving with the coloured girls, "These jubas. They just messing our girls" (Walk, 53). Gipsy reacts negatively to Willieboy's idea: "That any of your business" (Walk, 54). Later, Gipsy challenges Willieboy, "And what right you got talking about my guests?"...You don't know how

to act in front of respectable people” (*Walk*, 54). Even one of the coloured girls who are with the Puerto Rican was wondering: “Why don’t you throw him out, the unmannerly bogger?” (*Walk*, 54). The reaction of this girl and that of Miss Gipsy might show that what mattered for them were personal interests, as we saw in the story “At the Portagee’s”. Gipsy’s own words are more convincing: “You got a cheek coming to drink on the book and then insulting my real customers” (*Walk*, 54). A further analysis of the latter quotation shows once again La Guma’s desire to define South African problems as linked to class rather than to race.

3.2.3 *A Walk in the Night* and “The Gladiators”

“The Gladiators” and *A Walk in the Night* both describe some coloureds who believed that they were superior to Africans. In *A Walk in the Night*, for example, Adonis is convinced that he is superior to Africans. He reveals his conviction to Willieboy when he is explaining him about how he has lost his job at the factory:

“Well, a juba’s got to live. Called me a cheeky black bastard. Me, I’m not black. Anyway, I said he was a no-good pore-white and he calls the manager and they gave me my pay and tell me to muck of out of it. White sonofabitch. I’ll get him.” (*Walk*, 4)

Here Adonis denies that he is black. He is angry that the white foreman did not recognise or regard him as coloured. In other words, Adonis thought only Africans were supposed to be treated as he had been treated.

Similarly, “The Gladiators” shows “how important skin pigmentation was in the racist division of South African society” (Abrahams, 1985: 32) and how apartheid made the “racial group” the determinant of all social interaction (Erasmus, 2001:73). La Guma

created a story centred on a boxing match between Kenny, a coloured, and the Panther, an African. The narrator's description of Kenny helps the reader understand why Kenny thought he was superior to his opponent. "...just missed being white which was what make him so full of crap" ("Gladiators," 114). During apartheid, being a coloured, as Rive points out, "has hierarchic implications—inferior to and superior to Blacks" (in Erasmus, 2001:135). Under apartheid, coloureds, "...enjoye[d] more socio-economic privileges than the other two non-White groups" (Abrahams, 1985: 32). Kenny uses that privilege to minimise and dehumanise his opponent, Panther. Ironically, Kenny's overconfidence and his ideas of racial superiority do not prevent him from losing the match. Panther wins the fight with a knock-out, and when "Kenny came to, his face a mess and his mouth swell up like a couple of polonies" ("Gladiators", 120).



Not all coloureds in "The Gladiators" think like Kenny. For example, his trainer, who is, at the same time, the narrator of the story, explains to Kenny that he is mistaken in thinking that he is superior: "I reckon, 'Look, Kenny, you don't have that. Christ, we all blerry black, even if we off-white or like coffee'" ("Gladiators", 115). Gogs adds, "But we all get kicked in the arse the same" ("Gladiators", 115). Gogs shares Willieboy's view that "[u]s poor bastards always get kicked around. If it's not the law, it's something else. Always there's somebody to kick you" (*Walk*, 84-85). The behaviour of the policeman, Constable Raalt, and his driver in *A Walk in the Night*, confirm the words of Kenny's trainer and those of Gogs. The victims of the two policemen are all coloureds. The term "bastard" that Kenny used to refer to his black opponent is used by Constable Raalt to refer to coloureds: "... and no hotnot bastard gets away with murder on my patrol; yellow shirt and kinky hair; a real hotnot, and

I'll get him even if I have to gather every black bastard wearing a yellow shirt" (*Walk*, 63). Raalt did not make any distinction between coloureds and blacks. They were the same. They were both inferior and they had to receive the same treatment. The thoughts of Raalt's driver show the degree to which some hated coloureds. He wanted to sleep with a coloured girl and remembered that "it would bring great dishonour upon himself, his family and the volk if such a thing was done and discovered" (*Walk*, 79). It has to be remembered that, in order to protect the white supremacy over other races,

[b]etween 1948 and 1960 the [apartheid] government legislated against mixed marriages and interracial social mixing in cinemas and restaurants and beaches, while introducing increased penalties for sexual intercourse between different races (Chapman, 2001:184).



In short, "The Gladiators" and *A Walk in the Night* both aim, each in its own way, at highlighting the importance of a collective action against white supremacy. Like Peregrino, who "placed strong emphasis on the need for Black unity, denouncing coloureds who felt superior to Africans"(Lewis, 1987:18), La Guma, in the novella and the short story in question, wanted coloureds to forget the small differences and put all their energy into the common struggle with all the oppressed. His examples, drawn from the daily lives of coloureds of his time, make him more convincing.

3.2.4. *A Walk in the Night* and "Blankets"

La Guma's objective in writing the story "Blankets" is to demonstrate how badly apartheid affected the social lives of coloureds. "Blankets" shares this objective with

A Walk in the Night. In both texts, La Guma uses the themes of violence (which is sometimes linked to revenge) and poverty to explain the effects of apartheid. Both the story and the novella reveal that violence was common in the lives of coloureds. In the story for instance, its presence is found at the very beginning:

Choker lay on the floor of the lean-to in the back yard where they had carried him....

Somebody, a man, was saying: '...that was coward...from behind, mos'.

'Ja. But look what he done to others...'

Choker has been stabbed three times, each time from behind. Once in the head, then between the shoulder blades and again in the right side, out in the street, by an old enemy who had once sworn to get him. ("Blankets", 121-122)

As it appears in the above quotation, the motive of revenge shown in the stabbing demonstrates the theme of violence in the short story.



The theme of violence is present throughout the novella. For example, Michael Adonis murders Doughty:

The old man tried to get up and Michael Adonis said, 'Take your effing port' and struck out at the bony, blotched, sprouting skull, holding the bottle by the neck so that the wine splashed over his hand. The old man made a small, honking, animal noise and dropped back on the bed. (*Walk*, 28-29)

As mentioned earlier, in chapter 3.2.1, Adonis kills Doughty out of revenge for the injustices of , which he had recently experienced. It is therefore reasonable to associate revenge with his violent action. The theme of violence is also found in the death of Willieboy. Raalt, the policeman, treats him violently, and it is through this mistreatment that Willieboy dies. Earlier (Chapter 3.2.2), Miss Gipsy had beaten

Willieboy. Beating is another form of violence. Willieboy had been familiar with the use of violence since his childhood: “His mother beat him at the slightest provocation and he knew that she was wreaking vengeance upon him for the beatings she received from his father” (*Walk*, 84). I will come to this transfer of violence to an innocent person in chapter four.

The second similarity between the story and the novella is La Guma’s use of the image of blankets to develop the theme of poverty. In the story, the image of the blanket shows the poverty of the main character, Choker:

Somebody had thrown an old blanket over him. It smelled of sweat and having been slept in unwashed, and it was torn and threadbare and stained...The texture was rough in parts and shiny thin where it had worn away. He was used to blankets like this. (“Blankets,” 121-122)



The description of the blanket as dirty, thin and old, and the concluding sentence to the effect that the drunken Choker was familiar with this kind of blanket, shows that Choker was used to poverty. More importantly, the reference to ‘blanket’ when Choker was in state of unconsciousness (after he was stabbed) shows how the blanket was used as a representation of poverty in his life experience. References to blankets in connection with Choker are divided into two parts, and both parts, “taken together, tell us much about Choker and the life he has lead” (Medalie, 1988: xxii). The first part is related to the poverty of Choker during his childhood:

It’s cold, mos, man, Choker said. But it wasn’t the guard to whom he was talking. He was six years old and his brother, Willie [the name of Willie recalls that of Willieboy in the novella] a year senior, twisted and turned in the narrow, cramped, sagging bedstead

which they shared, dragging the thin cotton blanket from Choker's body... 'No man, Willie, man. You got all the blanket, jong'
'Well, I can't mos help it, man. It's cold'
'What about me?' Choker whined. 'What about me. I'm also cold mos.' ("Blankets," 123)

In the above quotation, Choker describes his childhood and remembers the history of the thin blanket and how he used to quarrel with his older brother with whom he shared the bed. The image of the blanket, in Choker's words, has two important revelations as far as social life is concerned: the size of the blanket symbolises how poor Choker's family was, and his brother's refusal to share the small blanket with him might indicate the selfishness and individualism among coloureds of the time. Selfishness and individualism caused by poverty, in turn, hindered the collective effort to fight apartheid. The image of "blankets" in this paragraph is used in 'Tattoo' as well. (See the quotation about the prisoner who is murdered by the gang, in which the "blanket" figures twice (both as a meagre protection against cold yet affording no protection when he is stabbed "through the blanket").

The second part shows Choker's experience with the blanket during his adulthood:

Huddled together under the blanket, fitted against each other like two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. The woman's wiry hair got into his mouth and smelled of stale brilliantine...

The woman was saying, half asleep, 'No, man. No, man.' Her body was wet and sweaty under the blanket, and the bed smelled of a mixture of cheap perfume, spilled powder, human bodies and infant urine ("Blankets", 123).

As demonstrated in the above quotation, Choker and his wife lived in poor conditions. The description of their blanket and the unpleasant smell of their bed illustrates their miserable situation.

The use of the image of the blanket to refer to poverty is also present in *A Walk in the Night*. It is found in the description of Franky Lorenzo's family:

Four of their children lay sleeping in the narrow single bed against the wall on the other side of the room. They slept under the one threadbare, worn, sweaty blanket, fitted together like parts of a puzzle into the narrow sagging space, two at each end of the bed with their legs carefully arranged...Now they slept, the two boys together, their mouths open, and the two girls, their stringy hair plaited into tight ropes....(Walk, 36)

La Guma's use of the three adjectives "threadbare", "worn" and "sweaty" (in the above quotation) to describe the blankets shows the endemic poverty of Lorenzo and his family. In addition to the image of the blanket, the image of four children of different sexes (two boys and two girls) in a very small single bed also indicates the prevailing poverty. If Lorenzo had not been so poor, he would have had one bed and blanket for two boys and another for the two girls. The fact that Lorenzo was poor and that he had five children (another one was on the mother's hip) and that his wife was pregnant is an indication that the situation of Lorenzo's family would worsen. In conclusion, as Medalie suggests "the blanket does not represent anything in itself; it assumes a certain significance or meaning within a particular context" (1988, xxii).

3.2.5. *A Walk in the Night* and "A Matter of Taste"

Socially and politically "*A Matter of Taste*" and *A Walk in the Night* deal with the problems of apartheid. Whereas, in the novella *La Guma* shows that coexistence between coloureds and is almost impossible (explanations were given in Chapter 3.2.1 and 3.2.2), in this story, he shows that it is possible. A poor white man, known as Whitey, goes to ask for supper from two poor coloureds, Chinaboy and the narrator of the story:

‘I smelled the coffee. Hope you don’ min’. ‘Well,’ Chinaboy said with that careful smile of his. ‘Seeing you’s here, I reckon I don’ min’either.’...

Chinaboy nodded at the stranger. ‘Sit, pally. We were just going to have supper.’...

‘Help yourself, man. It isn’t exactly the mayor’s garden party’. The boy took his cup carefully and blew at the steam. (“Matter”, 126-127)

Chinaboy was surprised to see Whitey among them and begging for supper. Chinaboy’s astonishment might explain his general conception of as rich and racist. However, he quickly goes beyond those racial barriers and considers Whitey as another victim of apartheid. Indeed, La Guma’s description of Whitey proves that there were no differences between Whitey’s life and that of poor coloureds. He was “thin and short... his hair was ragged and thick and uncut...He wore an old pair of jeans, faded and dirty and turned up at the bottoms, and a torn leather coat (“Matter”, 126).

From a Marxist point of view, Whitey’s situation confirms La Guma’s conviction that South Africa’s problems are linked to class rather than to racial issues. La Guma had expressed the same idea in *A Walk in the Night* when he introduced another white character who was a victim of apartheid (Chapter 3.2.2). However, coloureds in this story differ from those of the novella. In the latter, they were not prepared to accept and collaborate with who were victims of apartheid (Chapter 3.2.1), whereas in the former, they were ready and willing to accept the poor white. This has a strong message for La Guma’s audience. According to Abrahams, “It shows that, regardless of the racist laws of South Africa, which seek to destroy harmonious communication between the races, there is a natural

propensity among human beings to share their joy and despair” (1985:40). This explains why the narrator and Chinaboy did not brutalise their white guest, Whitey.

Regarding the sharing of common despair, La Guma makes it clear that a white and a coloured who are both victims of apartheid may have the same aspirations. There are examples of this in the story and in the novella. In the story, for example, Whitey wants to leave South Africa and go to the United States in search of a better life:

‘Ooh ja. I heard,’ Chinaboy grinned. Then he asked: ‘You going somewhere, Whitey?’

‘Cape Town. Maybe get a job on a ship an’ make the States.’

‘Lots of people want to reach the States,’ I said.

Whitey drank some coffee and said: ‘Yes, I heard there’s plenty of money and plenty to eat’ (“Matter”, 127).

In *A Walk in the Night*, Michael Adonis expressed the same view. He wanted to get a job on a boat and go to the United States because he is convinced that in the States everything is “smart” (further details were given in Chapter 3.2.2). These examples give an idea about the thinking of many of the oppressed around the time when the novella and story were produced. They had no interest in their own country, not because they were not patriotic but because many of the oppressed had no jobs, and those who had jobs had unskilled jobs and were not treated as human beings. They did not even receive the care reserved for machines in a factory. The words of a white boss in La Guma’s “Little Libby” cartoon might

illustrate my assertion: “These kaffir boys are very lazy--They ought to be made to work at least 25 hours a day” (Odendaal and Field, 1993:63).

The lack of harmony between and coloureds, as discussed in the last paragraph, is treated in a different way in “A Matter of Taste”. The latter insists on the possibility of inter-racial harmony. This might be exemplified by the disagreement between Whitey and Chinaboy “in regard to their taste of food” (Abrahams, 1985:41). Chinaboy argues: “I’d like to sit down in a smart caffy [café] one day and eat my way right out of a load of turkey, roast potatoes, beet salad and angel’s food trifle. With port and cigars at the end” (“Matter”, 128). Whitey politely criticises him, “‘Hell’, said Whitey, ‘it’s all a matter of taste. Some people like chicken and others eat sheep’s heads and beans!’”. Whitey’s argument does not satisfy Chinaboy, who, basing his argument on his six-months experience in a café, concludes that it is “a matter of money...I never heard nobody order sheep’s head and beans!” (“Matter”, 128). What is interesting in the Chinaboy-Whitey discussion is the management of their disagreement, which “does not affect their camaraderie and soon afterwards Chinaboy and the narrator plan the illegal freight ride to Cape Town of the White boy” (Abrahams, 1985:42).

In conclusion, “A Matter of Taste” and *A Walk in the Night* do not treat the social relationships between and coloureds in the same ways. However, they both deal with themes which are linked to apartheid.

3.2.6. *A Walk in the Night* and “The Lemon Orchard”

There are parallels between the social lives of characters in *A Walk in the Night* and in “The Lemon Orchard”. Both texts give “an excellent demonstration of how La Guma portrays the brutality of South Africa” (Abrahams, 1985:34). In a broad sense, the novella and the story deal with the themes of resistance, injustice and violence.

As far as the theme of resistance is concerned, the novella and the story explain the problems encountered by those brave coloureds who have manifested the intention to resist the apartheid injustices. In the story, for instance, the coloured schoolteacher ignores the common belief that are superior to other races and to laws and takes a white man, who was “the principal of the school and the minister of the church before the magistrate for assault” (Chandramohan, 1992:74). Other , who were convinced of their superiority over coloureds (and other races as well), and who were determined to do all they could “to ensure that apartheid’s authority is not challenged” (Abrahams, 1985:34), considered his action as an insult and decided to do something to correct the coloured teacher: ““This is mos a slim hotnot... A teacher in a school which we pay. He lives off our sweat, and he had the audacity to be cheeky and uncivilised towards a minister of our church and no hotnot will be cheeky to a White man while I live”” (“Lemon”, 134). In the eyes of this white man, all should enjoy the immunity that they had from the apartheid regime. This view by of seeing themselves as Alpha and Omega, and consequently as untouchable, is also seen in *A Walk in the Night*. In the latter, Michael Adonis’s white boss decides to fire him because he has challenged his authority (further details were given in Chapter 3.2.1).

The theme of injustice is another common feature of the two texts. Coloured characters in the novella and the story are presented as victims of the white supremacy. With the exception of Doughty in the novella, other white characters brutalise all coloureds they meet. In the story, for example, one of the five white characters says: “I will shoot whatever hotnot or kaffirs I desire, and see me get into trouble over it” (“Lemon”, 134). The notion of injustice in this sentence can be seen on three levels: first, shooting any person for no reason is itself an injustice; second, insulting a person by calling him or her a kaffir or a hotnot is another sign of injustice, and last, the fact that the white man was sure that after shooting there would be no legal proceedings is an indication of a society which placed beyond all laws.

The last common theme between the two texts is that of violence. In the novella, for instance, the white policeman, Raalt, brutalises Chips (Earlier, (Chapter 3.2.1 and 3.2.4), he had done the same to Willieboy):

Raalt held the dusty grey eyes on him and lifting his right hand up near his left shoulder struck the olive skinned man across the mouth with the back of it, saying, spitting out each word: ‘You don’t have to smile at me, jong. I ‘m not your playmate’...and Raalt struck him again, so that the blood formed in a pool in the corner of his mouth and slid out and down that side of his chin in a thin, crooked trickle. (*Walk*, 42)

Raalt’s sudden unjustified decision to brutalise Chips might indicate the general violent behaviour which characterised the police in apartheid South Africa. Other examples of the presence of violence in the novella were discussed in this chapter in 3.2.4.

As in the novella, the theme of violence is present in this short story and carry it out. Here is an example: “The man who had jeered about the prisoner’s fear stepped up then, and hit him in the face, striking him on a cheekbone with the clenched fist which still held the sjambok (“Lemon”, 134). The use of violence as a way of punishing the coloured teacher to force him to respect white supremacy and never to attempt again to challenge it demonstrates the brutality of .

3.2.7. Summary and conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to provide a socio-political comparison between *A Walk in the Night* and the accompanying six short stories. I analysed each story in relation to the novella and pointed out similarities and some differences. All the texts in the anthology deal with the realities of apartheid and all show how the latter affected the characters physically and psychologically.



CHAPTER FOUR: A LITERARY ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELLA AND THE SHORT STORIES.

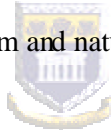
4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the literary techniques that La Guma used in the novella and short stories and show how different texts are related to each other. As mentioned in chapter 1.4, and explained in chapter 1.6, La Guma was a Marxist, and as a Marxist, he wrote in a realist manner. His use of realism was linked to naturalism. I will then explain the presence of realism and naturalism in the anthology. The content of this chapter requires an understanding of the terms 'literature' and 'literary analysis'.

4.2. Literary analysis and literature

Literature has given birth to literary analysis. To understand the difference between the two terms one should begin with a definition of literature. According to Barnett et al., "most theories of literature can, without much distortion, be put into one of three pigeon holes which can be called "imitative", "expressive" and "affective" (Barnett et al., 1985:2-3). Imitative theory suggests that art is an imitation of something. In his desire to imitate, the artist uses his or her imagination and interpretation to reflect "a special view of reality" (Barnett et al., 1985: 3). Expressive theory holds that "the artist is not essentially an imitator but one who expresses his [or her] feelings" (Barnett et al., 1985:4). Affective theory holds that a work of art ought to arouse a particular emotion or affect (to use the psychologist's term) in the perceiver (Barnett et al., 1985:6). All three definitions can be applied to La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* and the accompanying short stories. La Guma's motivation was to put in words the real situation of the lives of coloureds. At the same time, he expressed his feelings and created sympathy in the reader's mind.

Just as there are many definitions of literature, so there is a diversity of theories about the definition of literary analysis. In simple terms, it is an analysis of the form. According to Davis (1986:45), in literature, the form deals with “how it [literature] is constructed and how it functions so as to have meaning in the first place”. Davis goes further and suggests that in literary criticism, the term *form* has two general applications: “ (1) an understanding of a text’s interior patterning, or how it works; and (2) the recognition that form marks a work as belonging to a particular genre - a novel, a lyric, a drama, and so on” (1986:45). In literary criticism, critics distinguish between the terms *form* and *content*: “*form* being the pattern or STRUCTURE or organisation which is employed to give expression to the content” (Holman, 1986:192). The literary analysis that I will carry out will mainly be based on the concepts that include Marxism, realism and naturalism.



4.3. Realism

In the light of Lukacs’s argument “that realism embodies an objective approach to the social world and that realist fiction provides a convincing picture of historical change” (in Mkhize, 1988:32), Mkhize points out that La Guma might have used realism in order to accomplish his mission of becoming “an historian of people” (Mkhize, 1988:32). In considering the content of *A Walk in the Night* and the accompanying short stories, one might say that La Guma tried to become an impartial historian who reported facts as they were. Mkhize’s observation meets Holman’s definition of a realistic novel: “A type of novel that places a strong emphasis on the truthful representation of the actual in fiction” (1986:368). Concepts like “objective approach to the social world”, “impartial historian”, and “facts” do not have self-evident

meanings. Their meaning depends on their context. Both Lukacs and Mkhize have used these terms from a Marxist perspective, and this perspective has influenced the ways in which they understood those concepts.

Coming back to the reflection of reality in the anthology, La Guma's characters were the results of his preoccupation with reporting events in a way that was as impartial as possible. The latter preoccupation can be stressed by La Guma's own words in an interview with Cecil Abrahams: "I tried to avoid idealising the South African scene. I don't try to present a picture where all black people are good and white people are bad" (Abrahams, 1991:26).

The description of some of the characters, both in the novella and in the short stories, illustrates the presence of realism. In the novella, characters like Doughty, Michael Adonis, and Joe and Franky Lorenzo are good examples. If La Guma (as a victim of apartheid) had not been an impartial writer, in other words, a realist, he would not have described Doughty (a White man) in the sympathetic way that is demonstrated in the following quotation: "'Here I am and no body to look after an old man'. Tears of remorse gathered in his pale, red-rimmed eyes, and he knuckled them with a tangled skein of dirty cord that was his hand" (*Walk* , 27). Instead, he would have shown him in an antipathetic way, and he would have justified Adonis's (a coloured, as was La Guma) decision to kill him.

Similarly, in "A Matter of Taste", La Guma uses another white character to present South African problems realistically. That character is simply called Whitey. Since I described Whitey in chapter 3.2.5, I will merely mention that La Guma used Whitey

to prove that he did not want to consider all as the beneficiaries of the apartheid regime. Where it is necessary, La Guma describes both and coloureds as bad. This is what he does when he creates characters like Raalt in the novella. The latter was thoroughly racist: “‘I wish something would happen. I’d like to lay my hands on one of those bushmen bastards and wring his bloody neck’ ” (*Walk* , 39). He later confirms his hate when he kills the innocent Willieboy. The same hate was developed in “The Lemon Orchard”, in which the five brutalise the coloured teacher. Those who supported the apartheid policy found these reasons justified (Further details on this kind of injustice were given in chapter 3.2.6). In “The Gladiators” and “Tattoo Marks and Nails”, La Guma shows how the oppressed could become oppressors of other oppressed. In the former, Kenny (Chapter 3.2.3) speaks negatively about the Panther because he is an African (Chapter 3.2.1) and in the latter, “The Creature” does the same of another inmate.



In addition to the realistic description of characters, some pieces of the novella and the short stories are realistic in content. In analysing *A Walk in the Night*, Barnett insists that its ending is optimistic. Her argument is based on two reasons. First, she says, “Joe, a ragged boy without home or family, is the symbol for hope in the story” (1983: 133). Indeed, in spite of his problems, he was able to advise Michael Adonis: “‘You mustn’t go with those gangsters, Mikey. You leave those gangsters alone’ ‘What’s it to you?’ Michael Adonis asked, feeling both angry and embarrassed. ‘What’s it to you?’ Nothing. Nothing, I reckon. But they [are] mean boys’” (*Walk* , 71). Second, she finds optimism in Franky Lorenzo, “a man whom poverty threatens to force under, but who holds on to his love for his pregnant wife and family” (1983: 133-134). In La Guma’s words, “Franky Lorenzo slept on his back and snored

peacefully. Beside him, the woman, Grace, lay awake in the dark, restlessly waiting for the dawn and feeling the knot of life within her” (*Walk*, 96). This is an indication of hope for the future. Lindfors describes the quotation as “a symbolic promise of profound social transformation” (1989:125).

Similarly to in *A Walk in the Night*, in “The Lemon Orchard” and “A Matter of Taste”, La Guma also develops optimistic ideas. In “The Lemon Orchard”, for instance, La Guma uses the image of a “natural world” to end the story “with nature expressing the hope and defiance of the oppressed” (Abrahams, 1985:35). La Guma ends the story as follows:

They had come into a wide gap in the orchard, a small amphitheatre surrounded by fragrant growth, and they all stopped within it. The moonlight clung for a while to the leaves and the angled branches, so that along their tips and edges the moisture gleamed with the quivering shine of scattered quicksilver. (“Lemon”, 136)

The imagery of moonlight as a symbol of light in darkness is also a symbol of a better future in the lives of coloureds. In the same way, in “A Matter of Taste”, La Guma optimistically ends the story: “We watched him hanging there, reaching for the edge of the car and hauling himself up. Watching the train clicking away, we saw him straddling the edge of the truck, his hand raised in a salute. We raised our hands too (“Matter”, 130). This conclusion to the story shows the possibility of a peaceful coexistence between and coloureds that I have developed in chapter 3.2.6.

4.4. Naturalism

In chapter 2.2, I defined naturalism and showed how different critics have categorised La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* as a naturalistic novella. In addition to providing examples from the novella, this section will show how naturalism prevails in the short stories, and it will discuss the extent to which the naturalism of the novella and the short stories is comparable. The naturalistic elements found in the anthology are on the philosophical and artistic levels. Whereas the philosophical level consists of the determinism from heredity, environment and moment, the artistic level deals with form.

4.4.1. Minute details

According to Mkhize, "It is certainly accurate to argue that La Guma's narrative style is naturalistic in so far as it reveals his often cited pre-occupation with the documentation of minute details" (1988:34). At the artistic level, the use of minute details corresponds to naturalism. The latter gives all the details of characters and setting, and it helps the writer to convey to his readers his message in a very simple and convincing way. However, one should note that, in some cases, the more the writer gives complex and detailed information about characters and setting, the more his work becomes more complex and more convincing. Because of this technique, when one reads the entire anthology, one has the impression that one is seeing the characters. It is as if one is seated in a television room watching a recently released action film with special sound effects and clear pictures. One can see all the characters, hear their words or even go into their minds and discover what is happening. In short, La Guma's style in the anthology proves his ability to be a good reporter who has a sharp eye for all details. The use of minute details corresponds

with the scientific method, which a naturalistic novel has to follow in order to achieve objectivity. Holman correctly suggests that naturalism

Draws its name from its basic assumption that everything that is real exists in NATURE, NATURE being conceived as the world of objects, actions, and forces which yield the secrets of their causation and their being to objective scientific inquiry. (1986:285)

As a scientist, a naturalistic novelist must observe and record events in dispassionate and impersonal ways.

In the novella, the description of Michael Adonis is a good example of LA Guma's naturalistic approach: "His hands were muscular, with ridges of vein, the nails broad and thick like little shells, and rimmed with black from handling machine oil and grease" (*Walk*, 2). La Guma gives all the details related to Adonis's hand. And, to the reader, it is as if his hand was brought before his/her very eyes. A further analysis of the description of Adonis's hand might also indicate that he belonged to the working class. La Guma continues with the use of minute details when he describes his clothes and shoes:

The young man wore jeans that had been washed several times and which were now left with a pale-blue colour flecked with old grease stains and newer, darker ones of that day's work in the sheet-metal factory, and going white along the hard seams. The jeans had brass buttons, and the legs were too long, so that they had to be turned up six inches at the bottom. He also wore an old khaki shirt and over it a rubbed and scuffed and worn leather coat with slanting pockets and woollen wrists. His shoes were of moccasin type... They had been a bright tan once, but now they were worn a dark brown, beginning to crack in the grooves across the insteps. (*Walk*: 1-2)

In the light of the above quotation, the reader, without doubt, has a clear image of the description of Adonis's clothes and shoes. The use of minute description is frequently used in the novella. In fact, there is no single page in which this technique is not used.

The use of the minute description is also present in all the short stories. In "Tattoo Marks and Nails", La Guma gives all the details of the windows of the caserne: "The barred windows of the caserne were high up the walls, against the ceiling, and covered by thick wire mesh, its tiny holes themselves clogged and plugged with generations of grime ("Tattoo," 97)". With these few lines, La Guma helps his/her reader to gain a full image of the window in question.

In the story "At the Portagee's", La Guma uses minute details when he describes, for example, the restaurant where the two young women were, and what one of them was doing:



...There were other people in the café, too, and the two girls sat opposite each other at a table in one of the booths down the side of the room. There were empty Coca Cola bottles on the table between them, and one of the girls was looking at herself in a small mirror. The one in green".

There was a smell of cooking in the room, you know, oil and fried bacon and boiled vegetables and coffee. The ceiling was hung with streamers of fly-paper. ("Por tagee," 108-109)

La Guma clearly uses minute details here to help the reader gain a representation of the restaurant and of what was happening in it. This technique makes his style become more comprehensive. Indeed, it anticipatively responds to all the questions that his/her readers might have asked.

In “The Gladiators”, La Guma makes use of minute details when he describes Kenny. For example, “Like a bear if you see one, with sloping shoulders and big chest, and arms and thighs like polish teak. Not exactly like teak, because he’s lighter” (“Gladiators”, 114). Similarly, in “Blankets”, the use of full details is present; for example, the description of the place where Choker was laid:

It was cooler under the sagging roof, with the pile of assorted junk in one corner; an ancient motor tyre, sundry split and warped boxes, an old enamel display sign with patches like maps of continents on another planet where the enamelling had cracked away, and the dusty footboard of a bed. There was also the smell of dust and chicken droppings and urine in the lean-to. (“Blankets”, 121)

Through La Guma’s descriptive style in this quotation, the reader is given a vivid depiction of the setting in which Choker was laid. Though this style is attributed to his use of naturalism, which makes use of minute details, one might also say that it was also due to his interest in journalism (Chapter 1.6). This style motivates the reader and makes him/her want to continue his/her reading to discover what will come next. In “A Matter of Taste”, La Guma uses the senses of sight and sound to describe minutely the physical environment and the barking of the dog:

.... The sun was almost down and the clouds hung *like* (my italics) bloodstained rags along the horizon. There was a breeze stirring the wattle and portjackson, and far beyond the railway line. A dog barked with high yapping sounds (“Matter,”128).

In this passage, the reader can almost see Chinaboy looking westward, see the sun setting and hear the dog barking. Finally, in “The Lemon Orchard”, the use of minute detail appears at the beginning (it also appears in other pages, as is the case for all the short stories and the novella):

The men came down between two long, regular rows of trees. The winter had not passed completely and there was a chill in the air; and the moon was hidden behind long, high parallels of cloud which hung like suspended streams of dirty cotton wool in the sky. (“Lemon,”131)

In considering the few examples from the novella and the short stories that I have quoted in this section, it is clear that La Guma’s style respected the use of minute details. One important observation needs to be made before closing this section. The use of minute details, as earlier stated, is closely linked to Zola’s notion of scientific observation. Referring to Emile Zola’s ideas, Holman (1986:285) wrote the following: “...the ideal of the naturalist is stated as the selection of truthful instances subjected to laboratory conditions in a novel, where the hypotheses of the author about nature and operation of the forces that work upon human beings can be put to the test.”



4.4.2. Environmental extremism

Environmental determinism (Chapter 2.2) is one of the characteristics of naturalism.

Holman argues that

The fundamental view of human beings which the naturalist takes is that of animals in the natural world; responding to environmental forces and internal stresses and drives, over none of which they have control and none of which they fully understand. (1986:285)

To back his argument, Holman classifies environmental determinism under socio-economic determinism. The latter portrays the animal nature of human beings “as the victims of environmental forces and the products of social and economic factors beyond their control or full understanding” (1986:286). To understand socio-

economic determinism clearly, one needs to associate it to biological determinism, a hegemonic strategy. This puts its emphasis on “the animal nature of human beings, particularly their heredity, portraying them as animals engaged in the endless and brutal struggle for survival”(1986:285). Using these notions (socio-economic and biological determinism), La Guma is able to create characters who are entirely conditioned by their surrounding environment and their skin colour. One might say that La Guma aims to place his characters in the jungle where only the fittest survive. The notion of the jungle brings in the teachings of Charles Darwin, which are known as Darwinism. According to McMichael, “Darwinism seemed to stress the animality of man, to suggest that people are dominated by the irresistible forces of evolution” (1985, 896). In the light of Darwinism, South African society, particularly that of District Six and its surrounding areas, as described in the anthology, is not different from a jungle. Men living in that society behave like animals in a jungle. In the jungle, there is no respect for the rights of weaker animals. Strong animals impose their authority. Stressing the existence of Darwinism in the novella in an indirect way, Balutansky correctly points out that, “[s]everal critics have perceived *A Walk in the Night* as a largely naturalistic story in which the tragic fate of the characters is predetermined by the oppressive environment created by Apartheid” (1989:14). In simple terms, characters, as La Guma presents them, are mainly victims of external forces and internal drives.

There are different jungles in the anthology. One example is the white-coloured conflict. It is in this conflict, for example, that the white foreman fires Michael Adonis because he is more powerful than him and because Adonis does not respect his rights (Chapter 3.2.1). In this context, the primitive behaviour of the white

foreman can be compared to that of a strong animal in a jungle that imposes its authority on all weak animals.

Another illustration of the presence of “a law of the jungle” in the novella is in what can be called a coloured-coloured jungle. In this jungle, we see, for example, Willieboy attacking Greene with the purpose of robbing him: “He kicked Greene again and again, then stood back while the groaning man climbed to his feet. Shock and fear had sobered the haggard man, and he stumbled away, tripping in his haste to get away (*Walk*, 73). Willieboy robs Greene because he is stronger than him. Likewise, Miss Gipsy beats Willieboy “...Gipsy had her arms around Willieboy before he could do anything else...and at that moment Gipsy hit him expertly behind an ear. He fell on his face over the table, dropping the knife, and groaned (*Walk*, 55).



As with the novella, in the short stories, there are some examples of the presence of the law of the jungle. In “Tattoo Marks and Nails”, for example, the coloured prisoner who was the victim of “The Creature” and his group (Chapter 3.2.1) was a victim of that law. If he had been stronger than “The Creature” and his group, he would not have been the victim. Ironically, all the prisoners in the cell are victims of the apartheid regime.

Reference to the existence of the law of the jungle is also found in “The Gladiators”. Kenny’s arrogance and his conviction that he is superior to his black opponent, Panther (Chapters 1.5 and 3.2.3), is due to the situation that apartheid had created. As in the jungle, where strong animals like lions behave as kings over other animals, in the story, Kenny behaves as the king of the black fighter, the Panther. Similarly, in

“A Matter of Taste”, the coloured teacher (Chapter 3.2.4) is a victim of the injustice of apartheid, which did not want to recognise the non-’ rights, especially the coloureds’ rights in the story.

4.4.3. Pessimism as integral to naturalism

According to Mkhize, critics such as Astrachan and Lindfors have linked pessimism to the novella because “its characters are helpless victims who have no control on their fate” (1989:95). According to Astrachan, “*A Walk in the Night* is a short naturalistic novel[la] of murder in the underground...” (in Mkhize, 1998:95) and Lindfors (1966:10) supports him when he emphasises that La Guma’s characters “are victims of their environment and passions”. However, various critics have refused to accept that *A Walk in the Night* is fully pessimistic. Balutansky argues that



A Walk in the Night is an ironically deceptive novel: its style appears realistic and naturalistic while it is essentially ironically symbolic; its literal characters are alienated and ill-fated while its figurative character is a unified collectivity with a promising future. (1989:29)

To explain her claim, Balutansky says that Grace Lorenzo, Franky Lorenzo and Joe are symbols of optimism (Chapter 4.2). I share her views and would add that the same observations can be made about some of the short stories. I have already explained the presence of optimism in those stories in the previous section. My claim was and is supported by La Guma’s commitment to Marxism and his main aim of sensitising his people so that they will become politically active and fight for their freedom.

Some examples to demonstrate the presence of pessimism in the anthology follow. I will be brief in these examples because, in an indirect way, the examples I gave in the

previous section (4.2.2) also apply here. The oppressive environment that the apartheid regime had created put the characters in situations in which their destiny was in the hands of powers which they could not control. They were victims of a brutal and powerful social environment, which was created by apartheid. In *A Walk in the Night*, for example, all characters who are “set in the slums of Cape Town’s District Six, are deprived and degraded [so] that they are virtually unaware of the possibilities of self-fulfilment” (JanMohamed, 1983:230). This is so because they had no force to resist the injustices that they were facing.

4.5. Summary and conclusion

The main focus of this chapter was to explore the common literary techniques that La Guma used both in the novella and the short stories. I have explained that the anthology was written from a Marxist perspective and that it used realism and naturalistic conventions. The use of realism resulted from La Guma’s aim to put in words the real situation of the lives of coloureds. Regarding the naturalistic analysis of the anthology, three points were of great importance: the use of minute detail, the existence of environmental determinism and the prevalence of pessimism.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This purpose of this study was to recognise the existence of themes and literary techniques in the anthology. Thematically, the anthology deals with social and political issues. Narrowly, it deals with the theme of apartheid and its ramifications. Apartheid, as a racial political policy which established “a vertical separation of races” (Davenport, 1987:323), had influenced the social lives of characters in the anthology to the extent that it would have been quite impossible to separate social issues from political ones. A socio-political comparative analysis of the anthology as a single entity has shown common themes between different texts of the anthology. These include mainly the themes of injustice, poverty and money; violence, resistance, racial discrimination, racial coexistence, social class, misery, murder, and individualism.



Concerning literary analysis, I have found that the anthology was written from a Marxist perspective and that it used the conventions of realism and naturalism. The use of realism was motivated by La Guma’s main desire to become a social reporter of the people. In the examples taken from the anthology, I showed the characteristics of La Guma’s realistic style. He was a writer who tried to avoid generalising or idealising his characters because of their race. The examples of Doughty in *A Walk in the Night* and Whitey in the story “A Matter of Taste”, two who were presented as the victims of apartheid, helped to explain La Guma’s objectivity. Another characteristic of his realism was his optimistic message in the novella and in some short stories. This optimism was, in turn, linked to his Marxist convictions. Marxism plans for a better future.

Regarding naturalism, I used three important characteristics to explain the presence of naturalistic elements in the anthology. The latter were summarised in Chandramohan (1992). They include the use of minute details, the existence of environmental determinism and the prevalence of pessimism. The notions of Darwinian theories on evolution helped to explain the animal behaviour of some of the characters in the anthology.

The systematic socio-political and literary analysis that I have carried out in this study has opened new ground in the study of La Guma's work. As I stated in chapter one, this comparative study of the texts in the anthology is the first of its kind.



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