PROTEST IN FICTION : AN APPROACH TO ALEX LA GUMA

Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
of Rhodes University

by

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January, 1979

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to thank the Human Sciences Research Council and the Institute for the Study of English in Africa for financial assistance which enabled me to write this thesis.

I owe a special debt to my supervisor, Mr. Don Maclennan, whose guidance and encouragement has been invaluable. I should also like to thank Dr. N.W. Visser, who agreed to supervise this study before leaving for America; Professor M. van Wyk Smith, Professor Andre de Villiers, and Mr Charles Lagan, for helpful comment and advice; and lastly, Carryl, who endured.

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PART I

PROTEST FICTION: CONCEPT AND CONTEXT

Poetry makes nothing happen.

W.H. Auden

INTRODUCTION

listen to the shouting
and whistles
from the audience in that tube
when I swing on the outer handle
and rest on the bottom stair

THAT'S THEATRE HEY

they see me once
but only once
I'm on top of the coach
lying eight inches under
the main power lines

ACROBATIC HEY

they see me once again
but only once
I'm under the coach
lying on a steel frame
next to the wheels

CIRCUS HEY

fifteen stations

stupids packed
sardines in the tube
phapha - pha
poor black eyes on me ...

Motshile Nthodi, "Staffrider".

Nthodi's poem has given its name to a literary periodical recently launched by Ravan Press.[1] In this extract the staffrider is depicted

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[1] The poem appeared in *Staffrider*, 1, No.1 (1978), 28.

as a thrill-seeking stuntman, a crowd-pleaser. He rides the 'rods' or the roof of the suburban commuter train, inches away from death and inches ahead of the railway police. His station is above or beneath the coach in which the law-abiding "stupids" are travelling: not content merely to entertain, he mocks his audience for their lack of dare and goads them to follow his example. At the same time, he grasps a private freedom outside the law, a brief but exhilarating escape from the drabness of deprivation:

> Black boy
> no recreation centre
> no playing grounds ...
>
> money money money
> that's not enough for a boy
> what about entertainment.

The editors of *Staffrider* were quick to spot an affinity between the daredevil delinquent and the contemporary black writer in South Africa, who is also

> a *skelm* of sorts. Like Hermes or Mercury -- the messenger of the gods in classical mythology -- he is almost certainly as light-fingered as he is fleet-footed. A skilful entertainer, a bringer of messages, a useful person but ... slightly disreputable. Our censors may not like him, but they should consider putting up with him.[2]

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[2] "About *Staffrider*," ibid., p.1. After due consideration, our censors decided that they could not put up with him. The issue was banned.

Like the staffrider, the black writer entertains and provokes his audience; perhaps less obviously, he too "grasps a private freedom outside the law", an existential freedom which, because of the peculiar constellation of the South African state, necessarily acquires political significance.

In the act of writing, the writer acknowledges no authority higher than his own creative will. Like the staffrider clinging to his carriage roof, the writer 'comes into his own', realising a genuine if precarious freedom. In the context of a quasi-totalitarian state which normalizes the suppression of personal freedoms, this private declaration of independence has unusually strong political connotations. Dennis Brutus has remarked that

> ... one may say in all seriousness that to write at all once you are banned from writing -- and it doesn't matter whether you write well or badly -- constitutes a form of protest against apartheid in South Africa.[3]

Although Brutus is speaking expressly of proscribed writers like La Guma and himself, his comment has a general validity. Any South African writer, but especially one who is not white, writes *in spite of* the punitive sanction of censorship, the arbitrary threat of banning and detention, as well as the indirect pressure of a social, political, and economic system inimical to the realization and free expression of cultural aspirations. To write at all under these conditions -- it hardly matters what, so long

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[3] "Protest against Apartheid," in *Protest and Conflict in African Literature*, ed. Cosmo Pieterse and Donald Munro (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969), p.94.

as the writer is honest -- is an indirect challenge to the authority of the State and an act of political subversion.[4] This subversiveness is compounded in South Africa by the fact that the English language is not reserved for the exclusive use of whites, nor is the imagination bound by influx control. The black writer confounds the system through the universality of his enterprise. Such is the 'social mobility' of the written word that it makes a mockery of the compartmentalizations of apartheid which would otherwise deny the writer a complete and meaningful sense of self. In writing he may discover and express that integrity. It is no wonder that the South African Government has persistently tried to legislate the writer out of existence, for to put pen to paper in defiance of forces which strive to reduce the writer, in Fanon's terms, to the level of non-being,[5] is to say not only "I exist, and it matters that I exist", but also "I protest against whatever seeks to deny me this existence".

Thus for the black South African, the act of creative writing is inescapably a form of political action, and unless he turns his back on the reality which confronts him and retreats into a private imaginary world, it is also a form of social action. Yet Ezekiel Mphahlele has rightly cautioned that "creating an imaginary world" can never be an effective substitute for social action.[6] Composing fictions about

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[4] Nadine Gordimer speaks of "the relentless equation, in the minds of the security police, between black articulateness and subversion", "English Language Literature and Politics," in *Aspects of South African Literature*, ed. Christopher Heywood (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1976), p.116.

[5] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Paladin Books, 1970), p.131.

[6] *The African Image*, 2nd. ed. (London: Faber, 1974), p.73. Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent references are to this edition.

social and political problems is an indubitably oblique way of seeking a solution to them, and even the tendentious recreation of reality is only a metaphor for its actual transformation. Protest writing in South Africa is paradoxically a form of social action which is also only a parasitical imitation of social action, and therefore its avoidance. The freedom of literary creation described above is ambiguously not only a freedom to express reality, but also a freedom from the constraints of reality. And this suggests why the outlaw was such an important symbol to an earlier generation of rather more self-conscious writers. According to Lewis Nkosi,

> the non-white criminal in South Africa acts out publically what are the secret or frustrated wishes of the majority, which is to destroy the shackles which bind it to its despicable condition.... He is the living symbol of that defiance against the social limits placed on the majority by a hateful regime which the middle class and ordinary workers would like to defy but have neither the courage, aptitude nor means with which to defy them. It is not by accident that in South Africa the black middle class, including intellectuals and artists, accord the criminal who murders or robs white people the stature of a hero. In their most frustrated wishes he at once shows them the way and mocks their lack of dare.[7]

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[7] "Alex La Guma: the man and his work," *South Africa: Information and Analysis*, 59 (January 1968),3. From tsotsi to staffrider: from professional to amateur, from antisocial bandit to provocative, popular performer. This transition suggests by analogy important changes in the role and class position of the black writer in South Africa in the last two decades. Once practically a legitimated 'man of letters', the black writer is now a moonlighter. Kelwyn Sole has noted that "young black poets from Soweto have in conversation shown increasing antagonism to anyone who publishes at all", while admitting that the political implications of this attitude are somewhat unclear. "Footnote on Hofmeyr," *Work in Progress*, 2 (November 1977),42.

The relationship of the tsotsi as Nkosi sees him to the waking reality of the "intellectuals and artists" he mentions is akin to the relationship between a fictional character and his creator. Nkosi's romanticised portrait of the urban thug evidences precisely the kinds of selection and distortion which characterize the writer's freedom from literal truth. For instance, the tsotsi is viewed as the scourge of the whites, whereas in fact he is notoriously indiscriminate in his choice of victim, and the black middle class have reason to fear as well as admire him. Bloke Modisane actually sees the outlaw characters of his short stories as a projection of himself:

> Like me, my characters were invested with a contempt for the law, their efforts were directed towards a flaunting of the law; my heroes were social maladjusts in a society where heroism is measured by acts of defiance against law and order.[8]

Modisane's comment shows an acute awareness of the political implications of lawlessness in a society of inverted values, where for the majority of the people the law is synonymous with oppression. Yet, like most of the *Drum* writers, Modisane played no active part in politics and, like Nkosi, his "flaunting of the law" seems to have reached its apex in his affairs with white women. These writers were able to identify imaginatively with the tsotsi by writing about him, a cost-free identification which made no practical demands on their own life-style. As creative artists, their gifts enable them to enjoy many more lives than the one which history had allotted them, and one of their favourite imaginative existences was that of the tsotsi. Admittedly, some of their fiction exploited the political

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8 *Blame Me on History* (New York: Dutton, 1963), p.139.

significance of the outlaw in a way which Bernth Lindfors has dubbed "Robin Hood realism",[9] where the goodness of the hero is defined by the badness of the system at which he strikes. But many of the short stories of the *Drum* era which are set in the criminal underworld do not begin to attempt political statement and are content to celebrate the violence and danger of what is conceived as a glamorous life-style. All this suggests that what these writers really envied the tsotsi was not so much the political power he unconsciously wields as the personal freedom he attains in the grand romantic gesture of pitting his individual strength against an impersonal and inhuman system. Nkosi's identification with the tsotsi manifests with unusual clarity the role of the "committed" bourgeois writer as a man at play, playing at politics and playing at revolution. The championing of the tsotsi as a symbol of individual freedom is typical of the "liberal" attitude of the intellectual who has ideologically defected to the proletariat. When Nkosi speaks of "the social limits imposed upon the majority" it is clear that he is not talking about the political and economic pressures of a system which tries to turn its victims into compliant units of labour. He is voicing his anger and frustration with the whites who have said to him "Thus far and no further", with a society which has generated certain aspirations in him but refused to accommodate them.[10] Nkosi is articulating the interests of a class

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[9] "Robin Hood Realism in South African English Fiction," *Africa Today*, 15 (Aug./Sept. 1968), 16-18.

[10] cf. the reason Arthur Maimane gives for having left South Africa: "I felt stifled in my profession. I had reached the point beyond which only white people could go," *Fighting Talk*, December 1960, p.14.

which T.J. Couzens has described as a "repressed elite", a "privileged-class-which-is-not-a-privileged-class".[11] This black petty-bourgeoisie -- to which, arguably, practically all the black writers of the 50's belonged -- had a profoundly ambivalent attitude towards revolutionary politics. Kelwyn Sole, to whom this portion of the argument is indebted, stresses the political instability of this class, whose ideology is often in conflict with the reality of its position in relation to the existing mode of production.[12] Thus the black writers of the fifties found themselves in much of their work taking up the cause of the black masses while avoiding active political involvement, as Can Themba put it, because of "£55 a month".[13] Of more immediate relevance to the creative work of these writers, which is what concerns us here, are the cultural implications of the tensions and contradictions in their social position.[14] The black writers of this era were irrevocably culturally colonized but at the same time rejected by the colonizers as unfit to participate fully in their culture. Of no group is this more true than the Coloured writers who began

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[11] "The Social Ethos of Black Writing in South Africa 1920-1950," in *Aspects of South African Literature*, op. cit., p.69. Although Couzens is referring to an earlier generation of black writers, Kelwyn Sole (cited below) has demonstrated the continuity between this and the following generation

[12] "Class, Continuity and Change in Black South African Literature 1948-1960," paper delivered at the Conference on the History of Opposition in South Africa, University of the Witwatersrand, 27-30 January 1978, pp.3-4. See also Sole's "Problems of Creative Writers in South Africa: A Response," *Work in Progress*, 1, No.1 (1977), 4-25.

[13] Attributed in Anthony Sampson, *Drum: A Venture into the New Africa* (1956), quoted in Sole, "Class, Continuity and Change," p.21.

[14] These are penetratingly discussed by Sole in "Class, Continuity and Change," esp. pp. 19-26. See also Nadine Gordimer, "English Language Literature and Politics," op. cit. Of the autobiographical accounts, Abrahams' *Tell Freedom*, Nkosi's *Home and Exile* and Modisane's *Blame Me on History* are the most revealing. The issues are drastically over-simplified here for convenience' sake: there is of course a world of difference between the attitudes and writings of, say, Motsisi and Nkosi, or Nkosi and La Guma.

publishing at this time -- Richard Rive, James Matthews, Alex La Guma -- for whom the 'alternative' to Western culture could never consist in anything more than a particularly vital urban sub-culture. That the protest fiction of these three writers is consistently the most forthright and uncompromising of the 50's generation is surely no accident. In the course of this decade the Coloured people watched helplessly as their social and political rights -- such as they were -- were steadily stripped away, and experienced at first hand, perhaps most keenly of all, the hypocrital hoax that Verwoerd was perpetrating in the name of separate "freedoms". The literary reactions of these writers to the ever-deteriorating situation are diverse but interestingly representative. Richard Rive protests in the name of traditional liberal values, exposing the deprivations of "the dispossessed"[15] and the ironies of racial prejudice and colour snobbery. Allegorical stories such as "The Return" and "No Room at Solitaire" follow the familiar pattern of invoking Christian values to condemn those who claim to dispense a Christian morality.[16] His novel, *Emergency*, a partially autobiographical account of three days in the life of a young Coloured school teacher at the time of the national crisis in 1960, was published by Faber in 1964 and immediately banned under the new legislation. The effect of this development, as perhaps a personal focus

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[15] The title which Rive gives to one of the sections in the *Quartet* anthology.

[16] "The Return," *African Songs*, pp. 103-115; "No Room at Solitaire," *African Songs*, pp. 140-149. These stories employ a strategy which -- deployed more politely and with less irony -- abounds in the earliest fiction published by Cape Coloured writers. See the December 1912, December 1913, and December 1919 issues of *A.P.O.*

of the prevailing climate in the country at the time, was a hiatus in Rive's literary career which lasted almost into the seventies. This period of silence was a universal phenomenon consequent on the devastating spate of executive action in the early 60's which saw practically an entire literary generation disappear, as Nadine Gordimer puts it, as though through a trap door. Writers were harrassed, banned, detained and jailed, and over a dozen -- including La Guma -- were eventually forced into exile. Rive writes only sporadically now, and his recent work -- such as the short story "The Visits" and the radio play "Make Like Slaves"[17] -- is distinguished by his skilful handling of a trenchant irony: the sort of irony which Mphahlele described as "the meeting point of acceptance and rejection in the broadest terms".[18] A full half of Rive's *Selected Writings*, which appeared in 1977, is devoted to non-fiction -- literary criticism and occasional pieces -- and Dr. Rive (by virtue of an Oxford dissertation on Olive Schreiner) seems to have all but abandoned his creative writing in favour of a scholarly career.

James Matthews likewise started off by interpreting the predicament of his people from a liberal perspective, but contrary to Rive has been progressively radicalized by events in South Africa. He emerged in the seventies as a militant advocate of Black Consciousness with the publication

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17 "The Visits," The Argus, 31 January 1970, rpt. in *Selected Writings* (Johannesburg: Donker, 1977), pp. 51-58; "Make Like Slaves," *Selected Writings*, pp. 165-181.

18 Ezekiel Mphahlele, *The African Image* (London: Faber, 1962), p. 188.

of "protest songs" in *Cry Rage, Black Voices Shout*, and more recently, *Pass me a meatball, Jones*,[19] all of which have been banned by the Censorship Board. Matthews has been intermittently detained and imprisoned in the last few years, yet it is a testimony to his sheer moral and physical courage that he not only refuses to lay down his pen, but is publishing under his own imprint[20] some of the first genuinely popular literature to have appeared in South Africa.

Alex La Guma's family had long been activists in a tradition of radical petty-bourgeois politics, and Jimmy La Guma's son followed his father's example by joining the Communist party at an early age. The most accomplished as well as the most prolific of these writers, La Guma manifests his chosen ideology most clearly in the analysis of South African society presented in his novels. Like most of the other writers of this epoch, La Guma earned a living as a journalist and the papers for which he wrote -- *New Age, Fighting Talk* -- were leftist and mass-orientated. But, again like his contemporaries, he preserved a relatively elitist attitude towards his own creative writing, an attitude which in his case seems to have been reinforced by practical exigencies. All his novels and many of the short stories were written in the knowledge that they could not be published or read in South Africa, at a time when, after harrassment, arrest and detention, he had been effectively gagged by the South African Government in 1962. Denied an audience inside South Africa, he could not possibly be

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[19] For full bibliographical details of these and other works cited in this section, see the Selected Bibliography at the end of this study.

[20] BLAC Publishing House, P.O. Box 17, Athlone, Cape.

a 'popular' writer and thus fulfil the function which his austere Stalinist creed expected of him. Like Rive and Matthews, but in a more conclusive sense, his powerlessness within South Africa dictated the role of "[publicising] the facts of conditions in South Africa to an incredulous and apathetic outside world".[21] Under almost impossible conditions of incarceration and house arrest,[22] La Guma forged an elegantly tough narrative style in the tradition of the great Naturalists. What is noteworthy about his novels is not that he failed to produce a genuine proletarian literature, but that he was able to approach his material so objectively, with a complete lack of the introversion and self-pity which we might expect to find in a writer in such circumstances, and which we do find in Dennis Brutus. La Guma's first novel, or long short story, *A Walk in the Night*, was published in Nigeria by Mbari in 1962, and his two subsequent works, *And a Threefold Cord* and *The Stone Country* in Berlin by Seven Seas Books. His latest work, *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, appeared under the Heinemann imprint in 1972. Neither Rive nor Matthews was published in book form in South Africa until this decade. Rive's *African Songs* was accepted by Seven Seas in 1963 and *Emergency* by Faber in 1964, while Matthews has had two works published in Swedish: *Azikwelwa*, a collection of short stories, and a novel, *Mary, Billy, Cyril, John och Joseph*, which

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21 Sole, "Class, Continuity and Change," p.15.

22 Blanche La Guma has described to Dennis Brutus how even in the comparative ease of house arrest, each page of manuscript was stowed under the kitchen linoleum so that if the house was raided while La Guma was writing, the Special Branch would find and confiscate only the page in the typewriter. "Protest against Apartheid," op. cit., p.94.

has yet to appear in English. In addition, the anthology which 'established' these writers and introduced them to a wider reading public, *Quartet* (1963), was automatically suppressed in South Africa because of the inclusion of La Guma's work. The fact that every single one of these publications was banned in South Africa meant that these writers were writing an exile literature even while they remained in South Africa. Alienated from a popular domestic audience, this literature appeals to the social conscience of a more fortunate readership and is thus solidly bourgeois in orientation, following Western (though not necessarily English or even American) models and subscribing to Western aesthetics.[23] What critical self-examination there is assumes the perspectives of the 'high art' tradition,[24] which is understandable, because there is nothing uniquely different or "African" about the literature which warrants special critical treatment. By the same token, no apology is therefore necessary for the conventional Western assumptions and premises which inform the critical approach of this study. The protest writing of La Guma and his contemporaries in the late fifties and early sixties enters the tradition of English literature by virtue of its orientation.

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[23] A fascinating insight into the black writer's perception of his role at this time is afforded by an interview between Peter Abrahams and "N.J.J." of *Fighting Talk*, during the former's visit to South Africa in 1952:

"N.J.J.:... 'I think you can serve a very useful purpose here. We need people like you.'

Abrahams: 'I don't think so. Here I would be talking to the converted. In England I am able to use the radio and the press. Besides I can write. You need people overseas for that.'

N.J.J.: 'You can work here and still write. All good books about South Africa are published abroad.'" *Fighting Talk*, August 1954, p.15.

[24] See especially Lewis Nkosi's seminal article "Fiction by Black South Africans," *Black Orpheus*, 19 (March 1966), 48-54.

The method in the pages which follow is eclectic, drawing freely on formalist, structuralist and phenomenological approaches to literature. Its object is to describe and explain protest fiction as a literary rather than a social phenomenon, without betraying the paradoxical nature of protest literature, which presents itself as both social action and an analogue for social action. This mixed premise effectively disarms customary reservations about regarding the literary text as an event, a speech act. By treating the literary work as a speech act we bring into sharper focus its function and occasion, as well as the respective roles of its author and reader. We do not thus demean or conceal its "literariness", but on the contrary, enhance and lay it bare.

It will be convenient to allow the term "protest fiction" a certain degree of semantic flexibility. In a general context, "protest fiction" denotes fiction with a predominant politicizing or "conscientizing"[25] function; in a more specific sense, externally oriented fiction written by black, especially Coloured, South Africans in the 50's and early 60's.

That literature will reveal as many facets as there are lines of enquiry is a truism, and the line adopted here, which assumes the priority and autonomy of the text, does not purport to be exhaustive, or even comprehensive. Trotsky placed the contribution of formalist criticism in proper perspective when he wrote that "the methods of formal analysis are

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[25] The term is used by Gustavo Gutierrez to describe the "dynamic action of awakening" which is the aim of a revolutionary evangelism, in *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. and ed. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (London: S.C.M. Press, 1974). See pp. 112-117, 268-271.

necessary but insufficient".[26] The arguments which follow ought to be regarded merely as a point of departure, a foundation upon which others may build. Such a qualification may still leave room for doubt, quite simply because the concerns of the literature in question and the responses which it seeks to generate seem so remote from the niceties of academic enquiry. However, it is surely the business of literary criticism to help us make sense of our responses to literature, especially when those responses are unusual or disturbing. It is vital that a response germinated in the emotional hothouse of the South African situation take firm and steady root in mind as well as heart, lest its vigour flatter, only to deceive, under the onslaught of time and habituation.

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[26] Leon Trotsky, "The Formalist School of Poetry and Marxism," in *Marxists on Literature: An Anthology*, ed. David Craig (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p.377.

CHAPTER ONE

1 Literariness

Why there is so little worthwhile criticism of black South African literature is not hard to explain. Part of the reason is the literature itself, and part is the social environment from which it springs. There has been some good writing, but the best is arguably non-fiction, and of the fiction, the major part is either too parochial or too "slight" to attract and sustain much serious critical attention. But perhaps more important is the formidable impediment to the smooth application of conventional critical procedures presented by the whole South African question. The belief that art cannot do the work of a petrol bomb or even a pamphlet in a political struggle is credal to orthodox Western aesthetics, and yet the critic is apt to feel uncomfortable about wielding this orthodoxy in the face of the unique exigencies of the South African situation. He is entitled to be freely critical of West African writers because they have their political freedom, or at least a tyranny that they deserve. But if the work of black South African writers is superficial or narrow or clichéed or lacking in sensitivity, the fault is not theirs but the system's, the apartheid regime. The critic's scruples derive not so much from the unequivocality of the moral issues involved as from the plangent urgency of those issues, which spring from a contemporary actuality in which he is inescapably involved. The result is that the critic -- whether he is in South Africa or abroad

is immaterial -- somehow feels responsible for the lack of real quality in the writing. He feels guilty about acknowledging that lack. In order to dissociate himself from the problem and become part of the solution he may feel obliged to abdicate his proper role and yield to the emotional demands of his social conscience. Thus the editor of an anthology of South African short stories devotes his Introduction to condemnation of apartheid and eulogy of the writer who "With the wind for a tongue cries out across oceans, across time and space and dateliness...Freedom!"[1] More likely, as already suggested, the critic's response will find expression in the tendency -- ultimately patronising -- to regard the protest writer as the passive victim of an oppressive system and his work as no more than a particular mode of reaction to that system.

Understandably, it took a black South African critic to point out that the Emperor had no clothes on:

> With the best will in the world it is impossible to detect in the fiction of black South Africans any significant and complex talent which responds with both the vigour of the imagination and sufficient technical resources, to the problems posed by conditions in South Africa.[2]

So begins an article by Lewis Nkosi which created quite a stir when it appeared in *Black Orpheus* in 1966. While Nkosi indubitably remains the best critic of black South African writing, it is as well to remember

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[1] Herbert L. Shore, "A Note on South African Life and Letters," *Come Back Africa: Fourteen Short Stories from South Africa*, ed. Herbert L. Shore and Megchelina Shore-Bos (Berlin: Seven Seas Books, 1968), p.37.

[2] "Fiction by Black South Africans," *Black Orpheus*, 19 (March 1966), p.48.

that he was at that stage, in the release of exile, going through a reactionary phase. The enthusiasm with which he castigates his contemporaries for failing to absorb the lessons of modern masters such as Joyce and Kafka is exaggerated and mis-directed. In his eagerness to minister to the needs of what he perceives to be an ailing literary tradition, he wrongly diagnoses the complaint and proposes an inappropriate remedy. Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in Nkosi's own protest work, *The Rhythm of Violence*, which fails precisely because of the contradiction between his use of the techniques of modern French dramatists such as Ionesco and the conventional moral tone of the play. As Ursula Barnett remarks, Nkosi "fails to realise that the purpose of expressing absurdity is to underline the meaninglessness of life, the nihilistic and pessimistic *Weltanschauung* beyond logic."[3] The moral commitment of social protest, even in Nkosi's sophisticated form, is incompatible with such a world view.

Before any prescriptive judgement can be passed, the purpose, function and nature of protest literature need to be more rigorously explored. But first we must ensure that we have an approximate idea of what literature itself is, and this priority is respected in the argument which follows.

Most literary questions are ultimately questions of human value and hence cannot be entirely separated from the social dimension of man's being. But the study of literature is not sociology because

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3 *African Writing in English in Southern Africa* (unpublished doctoral dissertation: University of Cape Town, 1973), p.172.

literature, like other art forms, preserves a certain autonomy even in its social aspect. In the formulation of Tomars:

> Esthetic institutions are not based upon social institutions: they are not even part of social institutions: they are social institutions of one type and are intimately interconnected with those others.[4]

A literary work does not reflect, or reveal the influence of, any other social institution except through the mediation of the aesthetic institution or system in which it participates. The traditional and most obvious sociological conception of literature is thus a misconception. Literature, the traditional assumption goes, is faithfully mimetic: it has documentary value because it provides a direct reflection of the age.[5] It is a perfectly respectable source for the social historian with no literary background, provided he exercise due caution in respect of the fact that it is, after all, 'made up' and not literally true at all. In this view, the writer is merely a mechanical transmitter of contemporary impulses. A similar reductionist tendency is conspicuous in the sort of analysis which concentrates on the social situation of the writer and would explain his work -- as though he were a candlestick-maker -- in terms of current social and economic forces, which are regarded as causally determinate factors of production. These positivistic approaches, which construe literature as "a mere epiphenomenon

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[4] Adolph Siegfried Tomars, *Introduction to the Sociology of Art* (Mexico City, 1940), quoted in René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 3rd ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p.94.

[5] I am aware that this approach is hopelessly outdated now, and my quarrel is not with materialist theorists such as Goldman, Zeraffa or Williams, who reject the crude correlation of text and society as forcefully as any Formalist. The 'vulgar' sociological approach is introduced here for clarity of exposition.

of its surrounding environment",[6] have usually resulted in the crudest of correlations between literary texts and social history, yielding sociological insights either banal or wildly out of proportion to the evidence considered. The lesson is an obvious one. Works of literature are not simply troves of social data, and as Richard Hoggart reminds us, their "illustrative value" depends on "our ability to read them as works of literature, rather than to use them as quarries for extraneous buildings".[7] If we range this observation alongside the recognition that literature "neither 'reflects' nor 'arises from' society, but rather is an integral part of it and should be recognised as being as much so as any institution",[8] we are co-ordinating the twin premises upon which any viable 'sociology of literature' must be based. Literature presents itself as both social institution and work of art. Its institutional aspects embrace the set of practices and customs governing the circulation of writings in a given society: "the social status of the writer, his ideology, the form of diffusion, the conditions of utilization and 'consumption' and critical sanctions".[9] But it is only if a work of literature is treated as a literary work of art, with due regard for its specificity as a particular species of written verbal communication, that any sociological inferences can justifiably be drawn.

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6 Diana Laurenson and Alan Swingewood, *The Sociology of Literature* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1972), p.18.

7 "Literature and Society," in *Speaking to Each Other: About Literature* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970), p.20.

8 Joan Rockwell, *Fact in Fiction: the use of literature in the systematic study of society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), p. vii.

9 Roland Barthès, "Literature as Rhetoric," in *Sociology of Literature and Drama*, ed. Elizabeth and Tom Burns (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p.191.

The Russian Formalists have isolated this specificity as *Literaturnost* or "literariness". In the Formalist projection, a work of literature is an autonomous cultural artifact participating in a self-enclosed aesthetic system. The immanent-evolutionary or idiogenetic[10] character of this system is memorably captured by Shklovsky:

> The form of a work of art is defined by its relation to other works of art, to forms existing prior to it .... The purpose of any new form is not to express new content but to change an old form which has lost its aesthetic quality.[11]

At the same time the work itself is an aesthetic system or structure consisting of a dynamic system of signs. The essential task of the student of literature is to describe the constructional function of each component in the system, that is, its relatedness to other components and thence to the entire system.[12] We may accept the principles of the Formalist approach and ignore the polemical excesses,

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[10] "... comprising the stimulus of past aesthetic achievement upon the present aesthetic project". S. Morawski, "The Aesthetic Views of Marx and Engels," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 28 (1969-70), 303. Morawski uses the complementary term "allogenetic" to denote "the stimulus given the aesthetic field by that which is in other respects external to it".

[11] "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. and ed. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p.7.

[12] c.f. Jurij Tynjanov, "On Literary Evolution," in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, ed. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1971), p.68. A certain primacy is thereby conferred on synchronic textual analysis. But this need not render Formalist criticism ahistorical and non-genetic, nor equate it with "minute concentration on details at the expense of the system's development outside itself" (Laurenson and Swingewood, op.cit., p.62). See, esp., Boris M. Ejxenbaum, "Literary Environment" (*Readings in Russian Poetics*, pp. 56-65) and Tynjanov and Jakobson, "Problems in the Study of Literature and Language" (*Readings in Russian Poetics*, pp. 79-81).

which, once historically necessary, are now an embarrassing source of misunderstanding. The next step is to consider what looks ominously like a question begged, the nature of this "literariness" which sets literature apart from other forms of verbal communication.

A useful description has been formulated by Roman Jakobson, originally a member of the Formalist group *Opoyaz* and later a luminary of the Prague Linguistic Circle. Deriving his model from Information theory, Jakobson isolates six basic varieties of verbal function which correspond to the six constitutive factors of any speech event. "The diversity of verbal messages lies not in the monopoly of some one of these several functions but in a different hierarchical order of functions".[13] Treating the literary work as a composite speech act, Jakobson suggests that it is dominance of the poetic or rhetorical function in the functional hierarchy which constitutes the distinguishing trait of literature as verbal message. Dominance of the poetic function is signalled by "the well-ordered shape of the text", by a message which is offered *for its own sake*, that is, which self-consciously focuses on itself.[14]

As far as it goes, Jakobson's analysis is cogent and illuminating. But there are several implications flowing from this conception of literature as message-for-its-own-sake which have important repercussions for the complex of author-text-reader-real world interrelationships, repercussions which in due course will help to shed light on the transitional or divergent status of protest literature.

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[13] "Linguistics and Poetics," in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A Sebeok (Cambridge, Mass: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1960), p.353.

[14] Roland Barthès notes that "Jakobson's definition *comprehends* the sociological perspective because it can provide for the evaluation both of the way in which language becomes 'literary' and, at the same time, its relationship with non-literary forms of utterance". "Literature as Rhetoric," op.cit., p.194.

Jakobson tries to formulate a universal description of the communicative act, and therefore has to ignore the difference between spoken and written language. The receiver of a spoken message is privileged to be in the presence of the speaker, or at least his voice: the verbal construct is semantically enriched by signals of tone, gesture, emphasis, etc. The receiver is most probably in touch effectively, if not physically, with the context of the message, too. And in addition there is the possibility, theoretical at least, of dialogue aimed at resolving ambiguities or uncertainties in the context, code or message itself.

But the reader is given only the message, orphaned of speaker and context -- a chain of words upon a page, ungenerous and arid. He cannot even console himself with the sense of being the particular receiver that the transmitter had in mind. If, as Roland Barthes puts it, "neither politeness nor torment, neither the humanity nor even the humour of a style can conquer the absolutely terrorist character of language",[15] how much greater are the demands made of the decoder of writing, that "hardened language which leads an independent existence".[16] Roman Ingarden rightly talks of the "co-creative acts of consciousness" required of the reader,[17] who must reconstitute the communicative act by filling in its missing elements. This process of reconstruction, which is another name for interpretation, will inevitably proceed according to

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[15] "Literature and Signification," in *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), p.278.

[16] Roland Barthès, *Le Degré zero de l'écriture*, quoted in Johathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p.133.

[17] *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, trans. Ruth Anne Crowley and Kenneth R. Olson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973). passim.

certain relevant culturally given conventions. To interpret a text is "to bring it within the modes of order which culture makes available". more specifically, "to bring it into relation with a type of discourse or model which is already, in some sense, natural and legible".[18]

The sets of conventions which delineate such models may be described as generic: the term includes the concept of literary genre, but is here used with wider application. Claudio Guillén sees notions of genre as "mental codes with which the practising writer comes to terms through his writing".[19] Their function is to establish a contract between writer and reader which, by evoking certain relevant expectations, invokes an accepted mode of intelligibility.

Generic codes are historically determined in that they are constantly modified by the ongoing sedimentation of literary achievement. Is the same true of the set of conventions which isolate the more basic mode of intelligibility to which we assign the name "literature" ? A satisfactory, transhistorical, "essential" definition of the literary mode is a touchstone that continues to elude theoreticians, and it may well be a chimera.[20]

A particularly valuable working hypothesis is offered by Roland Barthès, who distinguishes literature in terms of its technique of meaning. His argument builds on Jakobson's model by exploring the self-absorption of the literary work as message-for-its-own-sake. Literature, according to Barthès, uses language intransitively rather than transitively. Transitive language comprises "practical" utterances indissoluably linked with the real world, while intransitive language "seeks not to transform

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[18] Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, pp. 137-138.

[19] *Literature as System* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p.390.

[20] Henryk Markiewicz argues that "the heterogenous character of linguistic work accepted as literary" makes conclusive differentiation impossible. "The Limits of Literature," in *New Directions in Literary History*, ed. Ralph Cohen (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), p.195.

reality but to double it":

> ... once a language ceases to be incorporated into a *praxis*, once it begins to recount, to recite reality, second meanings appear, reversed and evasive, and consequently the institution of something which we call, precisely, *literature*,....[21]

Thus the composition of literature is "the exercise of man's useless power to make several meanings out of a single utterance". The writer is concerned to multiply significations without filling or closing them: he uses language to constitute a world which is "emphatically signifying but never finally signified", so that literature becomes a system of meaning at once posited and unfulfilled. Barthès shows how this idea is tacitly acknowledged by normative literary criticism, which "accords a half-aesthetic, half-ethical privilege" to openly unfulfilled systems:

> ... "bad" literature is the one which proclaims a good conscience of fulfilled meanings, and "good" literature is on the contrary the one which struggles openly with the temptation of meaning.[22]

How is this thesis accomodated within Jakobson's structural model of the speech act ?

In terms of that model, the fictional element in literature is definable as an absent context, or perhaps a context deliberately exiled: "Insofar as the literary work is mimetic, it refers us to the 'real' world by interposing an 'imaginary world' between its audience and reality".[23]

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[21] *Critical Essays*, pp. 268-9.

[22] ibid., p. 270.

[23] Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature* (Newhaven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), p.27-28.

The reader is invited to enter an alternative, imaginary world, without forsaking (as if he could) the real world: in this sense the literary text offers up a double context. And it is this duplicity of context which releases multiplicities of meaning; for meaning posited in the context of the presented world is eternally disappointed or unfulfilled because it cannot be finally fixed by reference to the context of the real world. Yet, paradoxically, it is the real-world context which enables the imaginary world to signify at all, for intransitive language makes itself intelligible by pretending to be transitive.[24] This analysis therefore accomodates attempts to establish the logical/ontological status of literary meaning as apparently diverse as Ingarden's "quasi-judgements", Benison Gray's "non-verifiable validity" and Barbara Hernstein Smith's "fictive discourse".[25]

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[24] The term "duplicity" is particularly appropriate because it includes the sense of "artfulness" or "playfulness" which one critic sees "at the root of any purely aesthetic experience that literature may bring us" (Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature*, p.28). It is worth pointing out that the novel was initially intelligible precisely because it *pretended* to be a series of letters, or a biography, or a diary. A sophisticated code of "novelistic" conventions has subsequently evolved.

[25] See: *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*; *The Phenomenon of Literature* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975); and "Poetry as Fiction" in *New Directions in Literary History*, ed. Ralph Cohen (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974); also Ms. Smith's forthcoming *Fictive Discourse* (University of Chicago Press), respectively. For more strictly philosophical discussion of the logical questions raised by literature, see: Marcia Eaton, "The Truth Value of Literary Statements," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 22 (1972), 163-174; Laurent Sterne, "Fictional Characters Places and events," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 26 (1965), 202-215; and Dorothy Walsh, "Literary Meaning," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 22 (1972), 321-330.

Duplicity of context is matched by duplicity of sender, for according to critical convention, a literary text is written by a real person but narrated by a fictional persona. There is also a duplicity of receiver, though not in the narrow sense suggested by one recent writer. Robert Scholes uses Marvell's "To his Coy Mistress" as an instance of a poetic speaker addressing "someone not you or me about things which make our participation distinctly voyeuristic".[26] It is suggested, rather, that the reader becomes someone else, a "literary person", whenever he reads a literary text, through his submission to the code of conventions which pertain to reading literature. These conventions may roughly be subsumed under the Coleridgean concept of "poetic faith". For instance, although our "ideal reader" was once bitten by a vicious black horse, and consequently deems horses on the whole a bad lot, he will willingly suspend this opinion when he enters the imaginary world of *Black Beauty*; just as he will willingly suspend his disbelief in a horse's capacity to write its own memoirs. "Aesthetic distance" is therefore in this sense equivalent to the discrepancy between the reader as participant in social reality and the reader as *reader*, a persona as 'fictive' as the speaker of a poem or the narrator of a novel.

The conventions arising from the peculiarly literary experience that the reader brings to the text might also be described as a context of sorts; a context which functions as a kind of grid through which the work is read and structured as expectations are generated and fulfilled, and which enables the reader to recognise the text before him as

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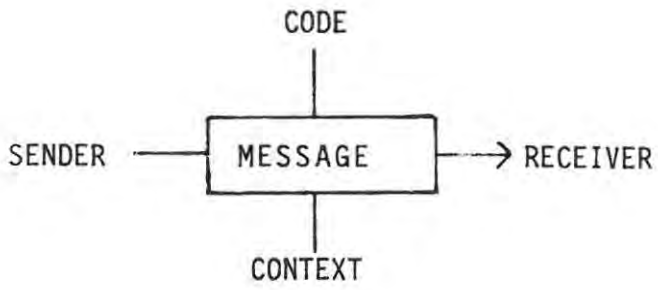
[26] *Structuralism in Literature*, p. 28.

"literature" in the first place. This literary "context" relates also to the duplicity of code involved in the structure of the literary work as communicative act. Scholes rightly contends that the writer "works out of a paradigmatic system different from that of the ordinary speaker", meaning that "when a poet selects a word for use in a poem, he brings into play a set of possibilities which is radically different from that used in our ordinary discourse".[27] In Saussurean terms, a different sign-system or code (*langue*) is employed in the writer's *parole*. The code becomes duplex because of the *pretense* of the narrator or poetic speaker to be using language in an ordinary way to refer to states-of-affairs within the presented world.

The diagram which Jakobson borrows from Information theory (see Fig.1) is therefore modified in its application to the literary work as shown in Fig. 2. (I omit the contact or medium factor, which remains constant).

Fig. 1.



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[27] ibid. p.29.

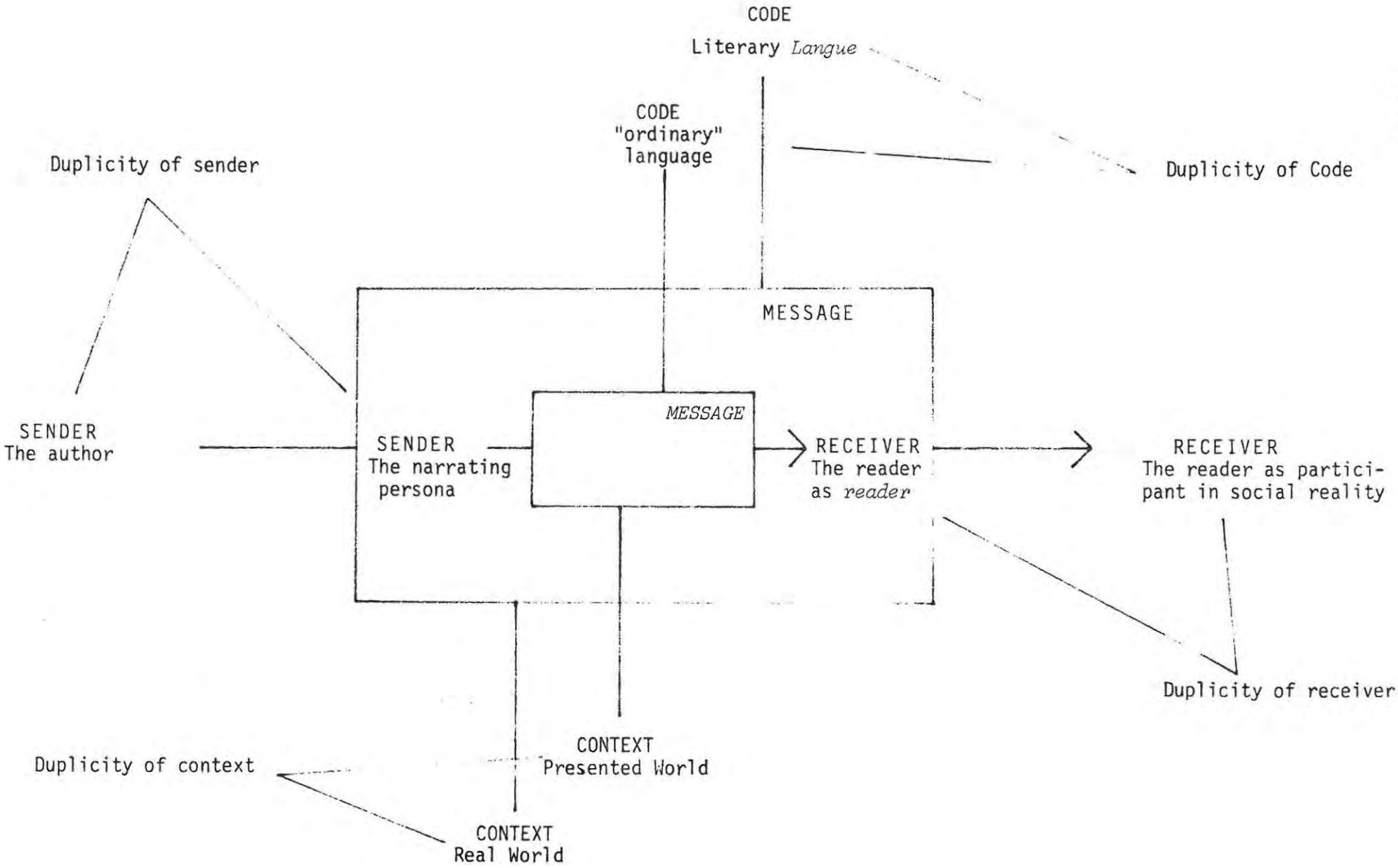
CODE
Literary *Langue*
CODE
"ordinary"
language
Duplicity of sender
Duplicity of Code
MESSAGE
MESSAGE
SENDER
The author
SENDER
The narrating
persona
RECEIVER
The reader
as *reader*
RECEIVER
The reader as partici-
pant in social reality
Duplicity of receiver
CONTEXT
Presented World
Duplicity of context
CONTEXT
Real World

Fig. 2.

An apparent problem arising from this model is that we are faced with two distinct messages, whereas before we had only one literary text. Yet, although the diagram remains misleading, this seeming contradiction may be resolved with the help of Ingarden's phenomenological investigation of "the literary work of art". [28] Ingarden conceives of the literary work as a schematized, stratified intentional object: to read the literary work, which amounts to re-creating it, involves a similarly stratified process of cognition. The final stratum in this process is the concretization of the states-of-affairs portrayed in the work into a realized, unified presented world. At this stage the prime function of the literary work of art, which is to allow the receiver to constitute the work as an aesthetic object and to allow the appropriate aesthetic value to emerge, has not been fulfilled. [29] The reader now attempts to come to grips with the "idea" of the literary work, which Ingarden defines as "a synthetic, essential complex of mutually modulated, aesthetically valent qualities which is brought to concrete appearance either in the work or by means of it". [30] As we move from the final stratum of concretization to an

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[28] *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art* (op. cit.), *The Literary Work of Art* (Same publisher & date of publication).

[29] Of course, the temporal-sequential character assigned to the process of cognition is partially metaphorical. "The literary work actually has 'two dimensions': the one in which the total stock of all the strata [and hence cognition of those strata] extends simultaneously and the second, in which the parts succeed one another". (*The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, p.12).

[30] *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, p. 85.

apprehension of "idea", it would seem that we move from the presented or imaginary world back into the real world. While artistic value may be structurally intrinsic to the work as a verbal artifact, aesthetic value is only released in the interplay between this artifact and the values of real human beings in the real world. We therefore move from the verbal construct which is concretized as the presented world in the process of reading (*MESSAGE*) to the greater message (MESSAGE) which is the literary work of art proper, an aesthetically valent semantic totality. This analysis appears in fact to clear up the ambiguity in Jakobson's own use of the term "message", which sometimes seems to denote "meaning" and sometimes "verbal form".

The essence of literariness is thus revealed to be a function of the literary work's mimetic premise. When the literary work is treated as a speech act, its propensity to intransitively redouble reality projects a series of structural duplicities which distinguish it from all other forms of verbal communication. This analysis provides a norm in terms of which the eccentricity of protest fiction may be measured and defined.

2 Protest

The term "literariness" has been, and will be used, to denote both the paradigm outlined above and the degree to which a literary work or series of works approximates to that paradigm. Notions of the 'literary' norm vary considerably from age to age and tradition to tradition. As the formalist critic Tynjanov points out,

> The very existence of a fact *as literary* depends on its differential quality, that is, on its interrelationship with both literary and extra-literary orders. What in one epoch would be a literary fact would in another be a common matter of social communication, and vice versa, depending on the whole literary system in which the given fact appears.

Tynjanov uses the term "orientation" to denote the verbal function of a literary order within a social order; that is, to specify the complex of relations between the literary system and extra-literary systems.[32] "Orientation" could presumably be represented as a 'locus of literariness' on a graph of which the two axes are the literary and extra-literary orders. The purpose of the discussion which follows is to define the orientation of protest fiction and thereby reveal its identity as both speech act and social action.

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[31] Jurij Tynjanov, "On Literary Evolution," in *Readings in Russian Poetics*, p.69.

[32] ibid., p.73ff.

Lewis Nkosi's much-quoted disparagement of fiction by black South Africans as "journalistic fact parading outrageously as imaginative literature" is in this context a seminal observation.[33] Although Nkosi is dramatizing his own critical evaluation and not seriously challenging a generic identity, the significance of his remark here lies in its implicit revelation of the extent to which the literariness of protest literature differs from that of mainstream modern Western literature. For while the writings in question make no claim to be factual or true in the logical or strictly referential sense, one of the first things to strike the reader is their deliberate and unequivocal attempt to involve him in a verifiable external world -- the world of contemporary South Africa, with its unique complex of social, political and psychological structures. We might say that what Jakobson calls the referential function is unusually prominant in the hierarchy of functions carried by protest fiction. But this referentiality, although frequently incorporating spatial or temporal specifics (real people, places, events, dates), is essentially towards conditions, states-of-affairs, and is thus a characteristic shared with several other types of narrative fiction.

In his monograph on the novelistic documentary, N.W. Visser uses the concept of the "work premise" in a discussion of related transitional narrative types.[34] The historical novel, according to Visser, is

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[33] "Fiction by Black South Africans," p.49.

[34] *The Novelistic Documentary: A study of the non-fiction novel* (unpublished doctoral dissertation: Rhodes University, 1973).

distinguished by a "mixed work premise":

> That is, the predominant portion of its work premise as it communicates itself to the reader is that the work is novelistic (including the criterion of fictional); the factual or historical portion of the work premise, though important and even to a degree determinative, is subordinated to the requirements generated by the predominating novelistic aspects of the premise.[35]

What bears closer examination here is the sense in which "subordination" obtains between the two varieties of work premise. The protest work, too, raises no problems of generic identity; the reader is never in doubt as to the novelistic nature of Rive's *Emergency*, for instance. The subordination of referential to poetic function ought to be explicable in terms of the cognitive indifference of the aesthetic consciousness :

> The aesthetic experience is imaginative not in the sense that all its objects are fictitious, but in the sense that it treats them indifferently, whether they are fictitious or real ...[36]

To the reader of Alex La Guma's *The Stone Country*, then, it should be immaterial whether or not there exist such things as the Pass laws and detention without trial in South Africa. But La Guma dedicates his novel to "the daily average of 70,351 prisoners in South African gaols

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[35] ibid., p.39.

[36] R.G.Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis: or the Map of Knowledge* (1946), quoted in Arnold Isenberg, "The Problem of Belief," in *Collected Papers on Aesthetics*, ed. Cyril Barrett, S.J.(Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), p.131.

in 1964"[37] and *de facto* demands a different kind of response from the reader. To disregard the documentary content of such a work becomes tantamount to accepting an imaginary invitation to aestheticize what the novel shows to be the brutalizing and dehumanizing effects of the South African socio-political system.

The work premise of the protest novel is therefore quite different from that of the historical novel, in that documentation in the former plays an altogether more urgent role. This urgency is not exhausted by a moral or didactic dimension. Sienkievicz's vivid portrayal of the depravity of paganism in first-century Rome was inspired by a serious religious movement, Neo-Christianism, and yet even when *Quo Vadis* was first published in 1896 it treated of cruelties and excesses too remote in time to be of more than antiquarian interest.[38] The difference, of course, is that while Nero has gone the way of all flesh, apartheid is still very much alive. And because the continuing existence of the apartheid system continues to issue a challenge to those who would change it, the tacit premise in the factual content of protest fiction is an imperative. The referentiality of protest writing is thus not a function in its own right but the formal indication of another function, that in which the focus of the message is on the addressee; in Jakobson's

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[37] Alex La Guma, *The Stone Country*, (Berlin: Seven Seas Books, 1967; London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1974).

[38] See Ernest A. Baker, *History in Fiction*, (London: Routledge, n.d.), p.144.

terms, the conative function.[39]

The statistic included in La Guma's dedication is more than a gratuitous snippet of information; its effect, as paradigmatic of the documentary content of the protest work, is sensational. The term is used in the sense defined by Vladimir Klima as denoting that which is calculated to produce a violent impression (that is, carry a conative function).[40] Klima penetratingly comments that "sensational effects usually derive [via the element of shock or some similar emotion] from a short circuit between things that exist and those that could or should exist".[41] The protest writer often spells out the discrepancy between the actual and the ideal by explicitly retailing a political or ideological point. However, while tendentiousness is of the essence of protest literature, overt polemic or propaganda is not. For assuming that protest, whether social or more strictly political, will have a broadly humanistic basis, what "could or should exist" is readily avaliable in the consciousness of the society which permits the protest author to write and be read.

To describe the orientation of protest literature as emerging out of its conative function is not to falsify the creative process. Orientation must not be confused with intention in the latter's teleological, goal-oriented sense -- which, arguably, is an illusion anyway. The protest writer need not necessarily be conscious of implementing a mixed

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[39] The emotive function is also prominant in the functional hierarchy of protest fiction, but not nearly to the same degree as in protest poetry. The immediacy and intensity of poetic statement cannot be sustained in the extended compositional strategy of the narrative.

[40] *South African Prose Writing in English* (Prague: Oriental Institute in the Publishing House of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, 1971), p. 124.

[41] ibid., p. 127.

work premise, although there is abundant evidence that this is frequently the case. James Matthews has even declared that he continues to write for one reason only: to motivate his readers to social and political action.[42]

Conversely, so conditioned is the orientation of a black South African writer's literary output by "the forms of diffusion, the conditions of utilization and 'consumption'" that it appears almost impossible for him to be received as anything but a "protest writer". A case in point is Dugmore Boetie, whose *Familiarity is the Kingdom of the Lost*[43] was hailed by Ursula Barnett as the harbinger of a new direction in black South African literature; and although the evidence of a single volume provides a slender basis for so bold a contention, there is no denying that Boetie's picaresque narrative is a radical departure from the autobiographical tradition of works such as *Tell Freedom* and *Down Second Avenue*.[44] Unlike these, *Familiarity is the Kingdom of the Lost* seems to defy the application of the 'protest' label. This is not to say that it is devoid of social criticism, but that such criticism is contingent rather than crucial. Boetie's struggle with the system takes place on a personal

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[42] In a personal interview, February 1976.

[43] *Familiarity is the Kingdom of the Lost* (Greenwich: Fawcett Publications, 1970).

[44] *African Writing in English in Southern Africa*, op. cit. Ms. Barnett even suggests that Boetie was attempting a "send-up" of conventional autobiography (p.94).

and not a political level; only with reluctance does he generalize about his experiences, some of which are quite fantastic. For Boetie is not a propagandist but an entertainer, a raconteur, who holds reality at arms-length and sniggers. His exposure in Barney Simon's afterword as a master con-man effectively topples his already shaky credibility as a witness. Of course, his "lies" and his penchant for the wildly improbable violate quite different kinds of generic expectations, but their effect is not dissimilar. Both serve to undermine the sort of relations between author, reader and real and presented worlds essential to the realization of the conative function.

However, the dust jacket of *Familiarity is the Kingdom of the Lost* attempts to bait the would-be reader with an excerpt from the only incident in the book in which Boetie (or his editor !) allows himself to comment directly on the political implications of his life of crime;[45] and Ezekiel Mphahlele can describe the work as an "epic account of the black man's life in a police infested state" and Duggie Boetie himself as "representative of the vital, almost unbeatable youth who must survive the continued assaults of white rule".[46] That the fictional Duggie is 'representative' of anything is a consequence not of the author's intentions (insofar as these can be deduced at all) but of the imposition of the reader's assumptions and expectations. It would seem that whenever a black writer purports to recreate his experience in

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[45] A fellow thief justifies their theft of a white woman's handbag on the grounds that it would "serve her right" for making her black servant sit in the back seat of the car.

[46] *The African Image*, p. 231.

South Africa, his work is automatically received as a document of social protest; a fact which can only be attributed to the degree to which that experience departs from the social and moral norms of his 'outside' audience, and this includes the whites in South Africa.

There is a similar predictability about the mimetic mode characteristic of South African protest fiction. In a sympathetic discussion of Alex La Guma's first novel, J.M. Coetzee uses the example of *A Walk in the Night* to encourage the would-be writer to "choose his tradition... with some sense of the social implications of his choice".[47] Coetzee's assumption that the writer is always in a position to "choose his tradition" is perhaps misleading. The moment of choice for the protest writer in a sense occurs at the point when he decides to write at all. Because his work is oriented towards disclosing and condemning certain facts of contemporary South African life, he is committed to a faithful delineation of these facts. He may exaggerate or misrepresent to render his witness the more compelling, but any such fabrication must remain well within the realm of the plausible if his credentials are not to be called in question. In fact, with deference to the material's inherent potential for wholesale and lurid exploitation, and aside from the kinds of selection and omission which are the artist's prerogative, there has been astonishingly little

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[47] "Alex La Guma and the Responsibilities of the South African Writer," *Journal of the New African Literature and the Arts*, 9-10 (1971), 6.

distortion and invention:[48] a phenomenon which no doubt devolves from the seriousness of the social responsibility incumbent on the protest writer.

Of course, most literary movements claim faithfulness to reality as the guiding star of their artistic programme; few, however, agree as to the precise nature of the reality which commands this loyalty. The realism of what Coetzee (somewhat perjoratively) terms the "experimentalist" line in modern literature is usefully described by Damian Grant as "conscious" in that it is self-consciously informed by the Twentieth-century awareness that

> Objectively reality has become fragmented, dispersed among a limitless number of conflicting subjectivities; it is no longer solid substance, but the sum of our illusions....[49]

But the reality the protest writer would transcribe is all too solid, monolithic; his realism must be "conscientious" (Grant's term) for his first

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[48] In passing, it is worth noting the potential effect of the most minor such aberration on the reader. In his autobiographical work *Chocolates for my Wife*, Todd Matshikiza mentions an incident in which a police raid on his home turns up nothing more sinister than *Black Beauty*, which the suspicious police nevertheless confiscate for examination. The alleged banning of *Black Beauty* has become part of the fund of bureaucratic mythology in contemporary South Africa, on which every second-rate hack attempts to draw. I can recall at least four 'eye-witness' accounts which would have customs officials or security police goggle-eyed over the innocuous animal story. For the uninitiated, Matshikiza's anecdote must be amusingly poignant; but for this reader at least, the authenticity of the book as autobiography is automatically, if unfairly, impugned, its value as "protest" seriously vitiated.

[49] *Realism* (London: Methuen, 1970), p.52.

obligation is towards the quotidian reality common to millions of South Africans, the reality which, after all, constitutes the concrete dynamic of the complaint. And if this reality is construed as wholly conditioned by social and political problems, then it is social and political reality that must be described, reality objectively or inter-subjectively existent and accessible to empirical enquiry. The epistemological assumptions of what is usually termed critical realism thus ordain it the logical vehicle for protest fiction.

Uncompromising realism is the protest work's chief formal means of achieving the appearance of documentation and hence the credibility essential to the realization of one factor in the orientational complex. Klima comments that the intention of the protest writers of the late Fifties and Sixties was to "present chiefly a revelation and analysis of facts".[50] And so Alex La Guma's preoccupation with sordid minutiae, the detail of poverty, is construed as an attempt to "increase the trustworthiness of his tales ".[51] There is no disputing that much of the impact of fiction by black South Africans derives from the reader's recognition of its authenticity: Nkosi quite rightly contends that the excitement of many of the short stories is "external", "part and parcel of a dangerous social stratum", rather than the result of "the inner tension of creative talent confronting inept matter".[52] An anonymous reviewer of *Quartet* adumbrates,

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[50] *South African Prose Writing in English*, p.121.

[51] ibid. p.143.

[52] "Fiction by Black South Africans," p.49.

albeit evaluatively, the attendant reading experience when remarking that the "interest [of the short stories] depends almost entirely on our willingness to respond with moral indignation to the apartheid conditions which they portray".[53] In fact, the autonomy of the fictive world in a protest work is necessarily inchoate, for in the juxtaposition in the reader's consciousness of presented and real worlds resides a structural function which is quintessential to the work's mode of being. One might even say that the more fact the work contains -- that is, the more keenly the congruency of real and presented worlds is impressed upon the reader -- the more effective the protest. This is almost tantamount to saying that the less 'literary' this literature is, the more nearly will it fulfil its function and achieve its purpose. One critic goes so far as to claim that in a "wholly political novel" such as La Guma's *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, "the heuristic functions of the novel form become redundant. The technique of documentary will serve as well, indeed better, since the artifices of fiction obscure where they do not further clarify".[54] The perspective is different, but we have come full circle to Nkosi's "journalistic fact parading outrageously as imaginative literature". It is time that we summarised our investigations of the orientation or 'locus of literariness' of protest fiction by returning to our speech-act paradigm of the literary work of art.

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[53] "Voices of Four Black South African Writers," *South Africa: Information and Analysis*, 36 (May 1965), 4.

[54] David Rabkin, "Alex La Guma and Reality in South Africa," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 8, No.1 (1973), 60-61.

Let us first consider journalism as a variety of communicative act. We observe that a factual report or propaganda bulletin involves none of the linguistic duplicities which spring from the peculiar status of the literary text. Yet since the journalist exploits a whole range of linguistic strategies in common with the novelist and short story writer, his communicative act is most fruitfully construed in relation to the literary model evolved above. The sub-literary status of journalism is then explicable thus:

> To the extent that an author resolves the elements of his utterance into unequivocal units, speaking to us in his own voice about referents immediately perceivable, he approaches the lower limits of verbal art. [55]

The poem, short story or novel approaches the descriptive sketch, essay, history or biography as the author becomes recognisable as the speaker or narrator, "speaking... in his own voice", from the matrix of his own prosaic existence; equally, as he addresses an ordinary person, and not that special literary person whose role is to constitute aesthetic objects. Similarly, as the context of the presented world is rendered indistinguishable from that of the real world, the unfulfilled richness of literary meaning is reduced, unequivocally located and fixed in referents "immediately perceivable", and fictive discourse becomes ordinary discourse.

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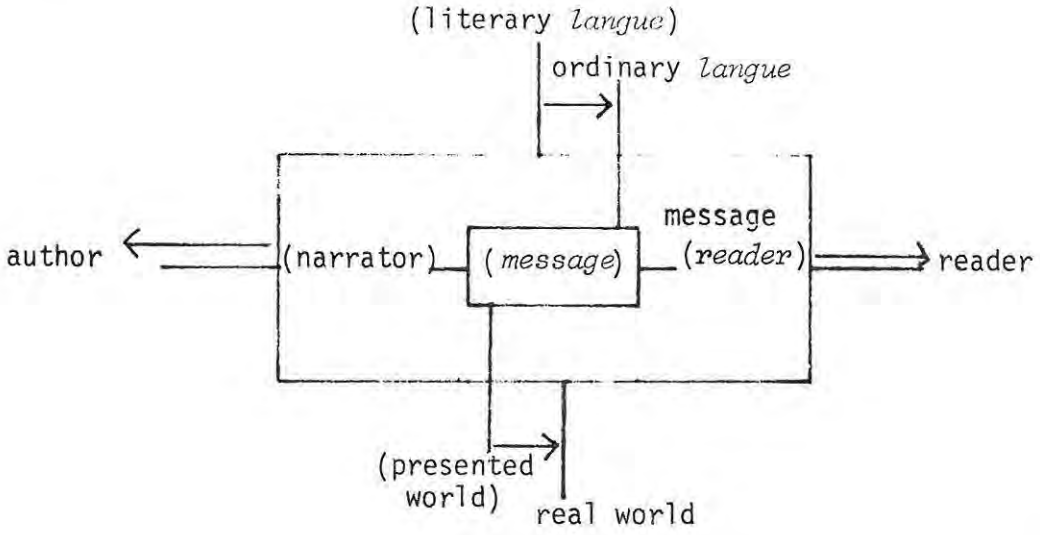
[55] Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature*, p. 28.

It is for the moment convenient to regard the range of verbal discourse as a continuum of communicative possibilities ranging perhaps, from a Symbolist poem to a report on the front page of the daily newspaper. Protest fiction was earlier described as a "transitional" literary form marked by a mixed work premise. Its transitional status is illuminated by our model of the speech act, which situates it somewhere between literature and journalism; its mixed work premise reflects the opposing pulls of these two modes of discourse.

The protest writer creates an imaginary world, but at the same time is concerned to make it as "transparent" as possible, for it is central to his purpose that the reader identify the presented world as the real world. His work is narrated by a fictive narrator, yet he is at pains to identify himself with the narrator in order to ensure the latter's credibility as a reliable witness of what he relates. Above all, the conative orientation of his work makes it imperative that the reader respond to it not only as aesthetic co-artificer but also as participant in the same social reality as that to which the work refers and which the writer himself inhabits. As a corollary, it is worth noting that the paradigmatic code of linguistic possibilities, the *langue* on which the protest writer draws, is seldom far removed from that of ordinary discourse. These proclivities may be represented diagrammatically, if somewhat unsatisfactorily, by "vectors of tendency" (See Fig. 3 overleaf).

Fig. 3 :



But how is this reader-work-writer relationship clinched? How, to begin with, is the reader alerted to real-world referentiality in the protest work ? First, as suggested above, the protest writer implies veracity through a strict adherence to the canons of literary realism, often including the names of real places, people, events and dates, and other verifiable real-world predications (e.g. Rive's *Emergency*, pp. 145-6, i.a.). But above all, the writer relies on what the reader brings to the work. The South African political system is so notorious that the writer may safely assume that his reader will know that the world he is presented with is not a wholly invented one. In fact the chances are better than even that the reader is primarily motivated by curiosity about conditions in the land of apartheid -- and this applies equally to white South Africans, whose awareness of life on the other side of the colour bar has been compared by Ezekiel Mphahlele to a glimpse through a key-hole.[56]

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[56] *The African Image*, p. 81.

However, even the most naive reader is seldom left in doubt as to the orientation of the protest work. For example, La Guma's first novel *A Walk in the Night* is prefaced by the admonition that "Only the names are fictitious". Peter Abrahams introduces *The Path of Thunder* by apprizing the reader that "While all characters and incidents in this novel are fictitious, the problems and prejudices are factual".[57] The reader of the Collier-Macmillan edition of Rive's *Emergency* is informed on the front cover that he is about to open "A novel that lays bare the truth about the Sharpesville [sic] Massacre" and has to wade through an Introduction by Mphahlele that bristles with the horrors of contemporary South African history but is almost bald of critical commentary. The blurb on the cover of La Guma's *And a Threefold Cord* describes the book as "as real as life itself... woven out of the facts of life..."; Brian Bunting provides an introduction full of fiery political polemic, and again La Guma indulges in an ambiguous disclaimer: "The names of all the characters in this book are fictitious".

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[57] *The Path of Thunder* (London: Faber, 1952). Eccentric disclaimers abound in South African fiction. See, i.a.: Francis Bancroft, *Of Like Passions* (London: Sisleys, 1907); Mary Frances Whalley and A. Eames-Perkins, *Of European Descent* (Cape Town: Juta, 1909); Francis J Edmonstone, *Thorny Harvest* (Johannesburg: C.N.A., n.d.); Robin Cranford, *My City Fears Tomorrow* (London: Jarrolds, 1961); Kenneth Mackenzie, *A Dragon to Kill* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1963). Gerald Gordon's *Four People: A Novel of South Africa* (London: Macdonald, 1964) includes a 'select bibliography' of relevant social histories, anthropological works and Government reports.

But let us imagine a contemporary reader, unaware even of the existence of South Africa, who stumbles upon a copy of, say, *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, sans dust jacket, sans dedication or epigraph -- just the bare text. Allowing him an adequate stockpile of typifications of the everyday world,[58] we would perhaps expect him to be fascinated by the fictional State's insidious web of coercion, sickened by the brutality of the police, and cheered by the spirit of resistance embodied in Tekwane and Beukes. But the verbal function of the novel as a speech act could no longer be conative and its orientation consequently no different from that of any other invented narrative. The true identity of the term "protest" begins to emerge. Richard Rive has described protest literature as "writing produced by blacks for white consumption", a formula which he qualifies thus:

> It was a literature produced at a particular time by a particular group of people in a particular situation....It was essentially negative writing geared as it was to invoking a sympathetic attitude from a more fortunate readership.[59]

What is salient in Rive's analysis is the 'particularity', the historical specificity it confers on the relation implied by the term "protest". For the protest relation to be realised, certain provisions must be met by the reader. To use the terminology of Ingarden's phenomenological analysis,[60] a valid concretization is achieved only if, first, the

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[58] Alfred Schutz's concept, which makes sense of both subjectivity and inter-subjectivity. See his *Collected Papers I: The Problem of Social Reality* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1962).

[59] From a letter to the present writer of 21/11/76.

[60] See *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, op. cit., passim.

reader consciously correlates the represented objectivities in the protest work with spatio-temporal specifics, "this-theres" in the "world-out-there";[61] and secondly, if the connative function is effected, which necessitates that the conditions which form the burden of the work's complaint are contemporaneous with the reading experience. This does not mean that either the term "protest" or the literature it designates will be incomprehensible to readers in years to come, when the current South African political system has been "shattered like the spider web/ In the fog of the seasons' end". Clearly, the term's historically descriptive capacity will be undiminished; but in a logically conclusive sense, the reader will be unable to re-create the role demanded by the orientation of the literature.

This, indeed, is what Edmund Wilson called "short term" literature. The implications for literary criticism of this built-in obsolescence will be examined in the next section.

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[61] The graphic terminology is that of Edmund Husserl.

3 The Problem of Evaluation

In the course of a discussion of the "effects of environment" upon black South African writing, Bernth Lindfors remarks that "when message becomes more important than method, literary art suffers".[62] Behind this modest prescription stands a considerable weight of tradition and orthodoxy. In fact, it embodies a principle so basic to the system of values in which the Western critic takes his bearings that we are inclined to accept it -- or reject it -- automatically and uncritically. Yet if we pause to examine the logic of Lindfors' statement, we notice that the main clause is redundant. What appears to be a proposition of the form

$$a \supset b \quad \text{(if a, then b)}$$

is actually a trivially true tautology of the form

$$a \rangle\ b \supset b \langle a$$

Lindfors is saying that if the dominance of the poetic function in a literary work ("method" -- the concentration on "the well-ordered shape of the text") is usurped by the conative function ("message"), then the importance of the poetic function decreases ("literary art suffers").

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62 "Post-War Literature in English by African Writers from South Africa: A Study of the Effects of Environment Upon Literature," *Phylon*, 27, No.1 (1966), 59.

In formulating this tautology, Lindfors seems to have committed the 'original fallacy' of deriving value from fact. By tacitly equating "literary art" with the value of literature, he has turned what is essentially a descriptive statement about the orientation of protest literature into a dismissive evaluation of it. And this is, *prima facie*, a rather dubious attitude to adopt towards a literature whose cardinal concerns are arguably extra-literary. Not that Lindfors' attitude is ultimately inappropriate: on the contrary, the ensuing arguments will serve to qualify, rather than demolish his position. There is no escaping the recognition that literary fact is value-laden, and that this value is in the first instance aesthetic value. The point is that Lindfors' judgement has been carelessly formulated and points to a glib complacency about the adequacy of orthodox critical methods to deal with what we have shown to be an unorthodox sort of literature. A valid critical tradition cannot afford this kind of indifference to the peculiarities of its subject, an indifference which is compounded in this particular instance by the fact that the immediate object of Lindfors' disparaging observation is not a literary work at all.[63]

The objectives of the discussion which follows are these: to demonstrate that (a) the identification of functional priority (in this case, that "message is more important than method") is *theoretically* a value-free or pre-evaluative activity, but that (b) in practice, it is

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[63] Lindfors treats a piece of writing by La Guma entitled "The Machine" as short fiction, whereas in fact it is only polemical journalism. See the discussion in Chapter Two.

impossible to separate judgement from the process of cognition. The simple descriptive labels "protest poem" or "protest novel" will be found to reflect contradictory premises, an incongruence of means and aims, which tends to undermine the very rationale of protest writing. It will be concluded that the aims of the protest writer are better served by non- or sub-literary genres which purport to document rather than redouble reality, such as autobiography.

A useful approach is through the Formalist concept of the "dominant". Jakobson coins the term to describe the "focusing component" of a work of art or system of works, which "rules, determines and transforms the remaining components",[64] or as Tynjanov puts it, effects their "deformation".[65] A literary work of art is not exhausted by its aesthetic function, nor is it a mechanical agglomoration of diverse functions. To identify its dominant is to combine "an awareness of the multiple functions of a poetic work with a comprehension of its integrity, that is to say, that function which unites and determines the poetic work". Consequently, "a poetic work is defined as a verbal message whose aesthetic function is its dominant".[66]

In the protest work, however, the ascendency of the aesthetic function is frequently challenged by the conative function. The protest work openly declares its involvement in a praxis and it is to be expected

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[64] Roman Jakobson, "The Dominant," *Readings in Russian Poetics*, p.82.

[65] Jurij Tynjanov, "On Literary Evolution," *Readings in Russian Poetics*, p.72.

[66] Jakobson, "The Dominant," p.84.

that its dominant will reflect its status and function in this praxis rather than in the relevant aesthetic system, and hence appear to be "extra-literary". This need not pose a threat to the avowed intrinsicality of our critical method. Tynjanov reminds us that "the very existence of a fact *as literary* depends upon... its interrelationship with both literary and extraliterary orders. Thus, its existence depends on its function. What in one epoch would be a literary fact would in another be a simple matter of social communication, and vice versa, depending on the whole literary system in which the given fact appears".[67] The literary code in South Africa has consistently absorbed functions which are generally the province of other communicative subcodes--journalism, pamphleteering, etc. -- in less precarious societies. The phenomenon of the politician turned writer or the writer turned politician is all too familiar in the interlocking histories of black resistance politics and protest literature.

The dominant is an index of the specificity of form, and the genesis of form, in the lucid formulation of one recent writer, involves

> a complex unity of at least three elements: it is partly shaped by a relatively autonomous literary history of forms; it crystallizes out of certain dominant ideological structures...and...it embodies a specific set of relations between author and audience.[68]

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[67] "On Literary Evolution," p.69.

[68] Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), p.26.

This "unity" is usefully construed as a flexible hierarchy which enshrines the priority of neither form nor function, of neither purely intrinsic nor traditionally extrinsic factors. Black South African protest writing is eccentric in that the "autonomous literary history of forms" occupies a subordinate position in its genetic hierarchy. It is shaped, inevitably, by the pressure of the whole tradition of Western letters; more particularly, by the example of the black American writers of the Haarlem Renaissance and the post-Renaissance Richard Wright 'school'. But of far greater moment in the determination of this literature's characteristic forms is its function as protest, as verbal message preoccupied with contemporary social and political conditions, more specifically, with the need for social and political change. The nature of the change urged and the alternative dispensation which it implies, its justification and the manner in which it is to be achieved, all proceed from the complex of ideas, beliefs and assumptions which we may tentatively describe as the writer's *ideology*: tentatively, because it may sometimes be necessary to distinguish this sense from the Marxist usage of the term. Here ideology indicates a conscious commitment, an act of volition amounting to a declaration of political or class allegience. In the Marxist sense, however, the term denotes the (often non-conscious) "social mentality of an age", the "complex structure of social preception" whose function is to legitimate the power of the society's ruling class.[69] Ideology in this sense is conditioned by prevailing social relations -- society's

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[69] Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, p.6.

'superstructure', which in turn is conditioned by its economic base, the forces and relations of production. As Marxist studies of authors like Balzac and Tolstoy have shown, there is frequently a disparity amounting to contradiction between a writer's professed beliefs and the ideology to which his work gives expression.

Ideology in the sense isolated above is perhaps closer to what Eagleton means by "a specific set of relations between author and audience"; but it does not exhaust this set, which includes questions of the social and economic status of the writer, modes of publication and dissemination, etc. Ideology, therefore (in this special sense, roughly equivalent to political self-perception), is the factor, pre-eminent in the hierarchy of genetic elements, which individualizes or specifies the general value constituted by the dominant.

It might be objected that the significance of ideology in a literary work is played out at the level of content, and, as Wellek cautions, *Stoffgeschichte* is the least literary of studies.[70] An examination of two pieces by James Matthews -- a short story from *The Park and other stories* and a poem from *Black Voices Shout* -- ought to be sufficient to counter this objection. Matthews' recent work -- together with some of Sepamla, Serote, Gwala and what may already be described as the "Staffrider" school -- is interesting because it is so obviously aimed at a black audience. Informed by the ideology of Black Consciousness, its primary objective is the politicization of the black reader. For this reason, Richard Rive distinguishes it from "protest"

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70 *Theory of Literature*, op. cit., p.260.

proper, which he sees as an appeal by blacks to the conscience of whites.[71] Although both sorts of writing share a similar "conscientizing" function, Rive's distinction is an important one, for it allows for the impact of the writer's (ideologically determined) projection of audience on his work. Matthews writes for the black masses, and plans his strategy accordingly.

"Baby, that's the way it is"[72] was originally written and performed as a one-act play, and the story preserves a strong dramatic flavour. This is the way it goes: two old drunks, Fietas and an unnamed companion, are sleeping off a binge in an overnight police cell. They are joined by a swaggering young bully, a "skollie" under arrest for "dangerous weapon". The youth tries to intimidate the old men, boasting of his prowess with the knife, but with little effect: Fietas is humiliated but not cowed. A violent clash is averted by the advent of another prisoner, a dagga pedlar named Jonas, who goes to Fietas' aid and chases the skollie around the cell. The hierarchy of power has been recast and the youth is now at the bottom of the pecking order. He is tried by an impromptu prison court for "assault to do grebous bodily harm", and made to forfeit his jersey and the cigarettes which he had earlier refused to share with the old men. Then two more men are pushed into the cell. Their Standard English contrasts sharply with the coarse dialect of the other occupants

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71 *Selected Writings* (Johannesburg: Donker, 1977), p.74.

72 *The Park and other stories* (Athlone: BLAC, 1974), pp.37-44. Matthews' story is chosen for close analysis because it manifests in extreme form tendencies characteristic of the protest work of literature. At the same time, it represents a departure from the tradition of South African protest writing by virtue of the aesthetic ideology projected by its dominant.

and signals their superior social status. Arrested for urinating in public after a party in a play-white area, they are nervously apprehensive about their first experience "inside". Jonas, quick to take advantage of this timidity, coerces them into performing an embarrassing song-and-dance routine. The young skollie, who has meantime "inflitrated and found himself a place in the midst of Jonas and the old men", joins in the fun at their expense. Then the cell door opens to admit yet another prisoner. The skollie, secure now in the protection of Jonas's authority, accosts the new arrival and makes an attempt to rob him of his jacket. And this is how the story reads from there:

> "Nice jacket yer got, I tink I grip it."
> The newcomer slapped his outstretched hand aside and pushed him away.
> "A Black cannot repossess another Black's property."
> The words startled them. Jonas looked appraisingly at the speaker.
> "Sit down," Jonas said. "Tell us what yer in for?"
> The newcomer settled himself with his back against the wall, facing them.
> "I didn't commit a crime," he said.
> "Dat's alright", Jonas said. He waved a hand at the others.
> "De ole' toppies is in for drunk, an' so de two party boys. De lighty issa moffie mobster, an' dey pick me up for gunston. Now, wat yer problem?"
> The newcomer looked at them ruminatively.
> "You know why the law arrested me? I didn't rob anyone, neither was I drunk or caught with dagga. I'm here because I spoke the truth!"
> "How's that?" Cyril asked.
> "I was arrested because I said that a policeman had no right to hit the three children who were selling fruit on the pavement. None of the children were over twelve. He was going to toss them in the back of the van. I told him that those children were victims of the system, the system that he was supporting with his brutality. I was arrested because I expressed my right to protest!"

"Der law is shit!" Jonas exclaimed.
"The law is part of the system that tries to destroy us."
"What can we do about the system?" Cyril asked.
The slender youth did not speak for a moment then he started singing softly.
"It's no good looking to the Lord,
Freedom can't be bought,
You've got to strike a blow
To have your liberty..."

(pp. 43-44)

Up to the arrival of the political activist, the story convincingly dramatizes Fietas' declaration that "Tings doan change". "I gotta fadder like you, I piss on him" the young thug tells the old drunk, while Fietas counters the skollie's boast about his expertise with the "lem" by revealing that in his youth he himself once stabbed a man to death. The skollie is the Fietas of thirty years ago, and Fietas is the skollie thirty years hence. And both are implicated in the misdirected aggression and victimization on which life within (and without) "Cinderella" is based. Like a dog chasing its own tail, the cycle turns in upon itself, the strong exploiting the weak and perpetuating the degradation of all. But the process is abruptly arrested by the entry of the politically-educated advocate of black consciousness. Earlier, the two old men are "wrapped in blankets as if they had marked out their territorial rights". The skollie refuses to share his tobacco with the old men, one of whom avenges himself by appropriating the youth's jersey. The youth in turn is about to help himself to the newcomer's jacket when he is stopped short by the admonition that "'A Black cannot repossess another Black's property'". The first lesson he and the others have to learn is to positively revalue their identity and act accordingly. Solidarity, sharing, mutual respect (Jonas has earlier rebuked the skollie with

the warning that "Yer take Fietas too lightly.... Dat's de trouble wit' people") are prerequisites for the struggle against the system. The system is unjust and destructive and the law, its cutting edge, is an instrument of oppression which denies its subjects the right to protest. The remedy lies in the violent overthrow of the system, or at least in the kind of decisive action implied by the vague exhortation to "strike a blow".

This cursory explication may give the impression that "Baby, that's the way it is" is a structurally cohesive piece of writing. But the reader's experience of it is altogether different (of course, "the reader" here is the reflective or critical reader, and not at all the reader to whom the story appears to be addressed. The question of the practical utility of the story as political statement will be answered in due course). The conclusion of the story is oddly unsatisfying. An initial reaction that it is "unrealistic" can be refined to the objection that it is capricious, that it does not arise from the preceeding action according to the Aristotelian canon of probability; that, on the contrary, it is arbitrarily imposed upon the action from without. Considered as a whole, the plot does not offer a resolution of those issues out of which it has begun; its end is not entailed in its beginning. In formalist terms, the mimetic function of plot has been deformed or "automized" by the dominant. The mimetic functions of both character and diction are similarly effaced: the advocate of black consciousness who enters like a *deus ex machina* is merely a mouthpiece for a series of political slogans. Matthews makes no effort to establish the verisimilitude of his identity as a character in the

fictional world, which is important, because it suggests that the story is eccentric not because it inadvertently offends certain notions of probability, but because it acknowledges no allegiance to such notions. The distinction is a crucial one for the neo-Aristotelian critic Elder Olson, for it divides what he calls "didactic poetry" from "mimetic poetry". The characters in a didactic poem, writes Olson,

> ...very generally represent the subjects, and the incidents the predicates, of the doctrinal proposition .... They exist because the doctrine exists and because it must be presented in a certain way; they are what they are because the doctrine has certain characteristics. The allegorical incident happens, not because it is necessary or probable in the light of other events, but because a certain doctrinal subject must have a certain doctrinal predicate; its order in the action is determined not by the action as action, but by the action as doctrine; and whatever emotional quality or force it may have is determined rather by the emotional attitude which the doctrine must inculcate towards a certain object than by the context of action in which it occurs.[73]

In a mimetic work, which seeks to imitate an action, the action itself gives unity and completeness to the imitation, whereas in a didactic work completeness depends upon the doctrine: the work is complete when the doctrine is completely expressed or when the author has done everything he can to advance it. To object, therefore, that "Baby, that's the way it is" is aesthetically incomplete or incoherent is to apply inappropriate standards of judgement and misinterpret the story's generic identity.

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[73] "William Empson," Contemporary Criticism, and Poetic Diction," in *Critics and Criticism*, ed.R.S.Crane (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1952), p.67.

But is it an altogether inappropriate reaction? The trouble is that right up until the first utterance of the political prisoner, the short story reads like an orthodox "imitation of an action". The remainder of the story is disappointing because it fails to meet generic expectations generated by the narrative itself. The tension which sustains the early part of the narrative derives from the psychological realism of the characterization, not from the dialectic of Matthews' political thesis. The characters do not exist for the sake of any doctrine: they speak for themselves, and as they speak they create a carefully discriminated fictional world. This world is, of course, related to the real world in a manner defined by the conventions of literary (critical) realism, but it is organised according to its own laws. Its distance from the real world is increased by the physical isolation of the fictional setting from its own world-at-large, the fictional counterpart of the real world which is the occasion of the author's protest. This world-at-large is contingent rather than essential to the function of the characters in the plot.

But all this changes with the arrival of the political prisoner. The relation between fictional and real worlds, in terms of which we have begun to 'naturalize' the story, is abruptly dislocated. The autonomy of the fictional world evaporates as we are made to revalue the preceeding action in terms of its significance in the real world.

It seems that this violation of generic expectations can be viewed in both a negative and a positive light, when we come to consider the function of the story as verbal communication. On the one hand, the young activist has not earned the claim which he makes on the reader's sympathies. The evils of the system he berates are perfunctorily reported in a single paragraph. The reader does not begin to re-create for himself the repression and suffering which give occasion and point to

the rhetorical abstractions, and so they remain merely abstractions. It is possible to argue that Matthews intended to implicate all the inmates of the cell in the revolutionary's declaration that "The law is part of the system that tries to destroy us". But unlike La Guma's careful exposition in novels such as *A Walk in the Night* and *The Stone Country*, Matthews' technique does not begin to clinch the causal link between socio-economic system and individual criminal. As it is, Matthews might be accused of nonsensically suggesting that "Der law is shit" because it has sought to discipline a couple of drunks and punish a drug-dealer and a knife-wielding hoodlum.

By ending the story the way he does, Matthews also ducks the responsibility of demonstrating the effect of the slogan-mongering on the newly politicized inmates. Even Marxist critics might take him to task on this score. The responsibility of depicting "actuality in its revolutionary development"[74] behoves the writer to dramatize the synthesis as well as the thesis and antithesis of the revolutionary dialectic. At any rate, judging by the behaviour of the characters thus far, we have no grounds for supposing that Fietas' dictum -- "Fings doan change" -- is likely to be rebutted with such facility.

On the other hand, the jolt produced by the generic violation of "Baby, that's the way it is" is exactly analogous to the perceptual jolt of politicization or conscientization. Matthews' intention to

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[74] A.A.Zhadanov at the First All-Soviet Congress of Writers, August 17, 1934, quoted in *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, ed. George J.Becker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963). p. 487.

reform is acted out in the de-forming of a familiar artistic mode and its re-forming into something quite different. There is more than a verbal quibble at issue here. The protest writer must destroy in order to build anew, and a good place to start is with the reader's complacency *as reader*.

Much of Matthews' poetry raises the same sorts of questions as his short fiction. This untitled poem appeared in the anthology *Black Voices Shout!* :[75]

> for those who have been
> banned, jailed, exiled or dead
> the torch that you've lit
> cannot be doused or dimmed
> by the 180-day act, a prison
> cell, banishment or grave
> they cannot silence a thought
> for freedom's cry will
> not be stilled
>
> Imam Haron
> dead
> died for his belief in
> freedom and God
>
> Robert Sobukwe
> banned
> movement restricted; confined home
> between dusk and dawn
>
> Nelson Mandela
> jailed
> living out his time
> in a water-locked cage
>
> Bessie Head
> exiled
> restless in a distant land
> her heart buried here

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[75] *Black Voices Shout*, ed. James Matthews (Athlone: BLAC, 1974), p.5.

for those who've been
banned, jailed, exiled or dead
the torch that you've lit
cannot be doused or dimmed
by the 180-day act, a prison
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they cannot silence a thought
for freedom's cry will
not be stilled

This poem manifests few of the formal resonances which normally define and sustain the medium. It is a straightforward statement which combines the functions of declaration and exhortation. And -- to put Olson's metaphor to a different use -- the logic of its ontology is precisely the grammar of the statement. The principle or doctrine articulated in the declaration, which is superordinate and prior to the poem itself, is the subject, and its embodiment in the poem is its necessary and predetermined predicate. The poem itself as a verbal construct lacks autonomy and is, in the grammar of its ontology, a fragment. This is not to say that the poem is necessarily flawed or unfinished, but that, like "Baby, that's the way it is", the whole which it forms is of a different order from the whole of what the neo-Aristotelians would call a mimetic poem. The form of this poem does not body forth the working out of a particular structure of feeling or perception which is inseparable from and identical with its verbal concretization. On the contrary, the feeling which informs it is pre-given; indeed, its independant pre-givenness is what 'enables' and validates the poem. Furthermore, "for those who have been..." eschews what Shklovsky maintained to be the defining function of poetic language : *ostraneniye*, or defamiliarization. For Matthews' intention is to *make familiar*, to endorse the natural process of abstraction which has led to the pre-given feeling

or doctrine of the poem, the process which interprets or "naturalizes" the specific in terms of the general. Thus the widely differing fates of four South Africans are embraced by (the force of the verb is literal as well as figurative, as a glance at the layout of the poem will confirm) conventional images of the undying flame and irrepressible voice of freedom. These images are so orthodox that they function a-metaphorically, as signs rather than symbols, adding no new dimension to the sense of the statement. They are paradigmatic of the poem as a whole in that they make no heuristic demands of the reader whatsoever. Matthews' intention is to present his readers with as lucid and memorable a credo as possible, and this intention is formally signalled by the automization of imagery, and indeed of language generally in the poem. Language is imported intact from the real world; there is no creative distortion, no internal pressure on it, and its effects are no different from those it would have in any other context. Automization extends even to the element by which, perhaps above all others, we immediately identify and begin to "naturalize" the text as a poem -- linnear division. Linnear division undoubtedly helps to elevate the utterance and invest it with a certain portentous gravity apposite to the burden of its sentiment; but to what extent such a function is "structural" is uncertain. On the whole, linnear division announces that we are confronted by a poem, but declines to make a poetic contribution. The one word lines are perhaps an exception, for they itemize the inventory of martyrdoms which opens and closes the poem, and hence participate structurally in the exposition of theme. But even here, what is initially an arbitrary sequence (except for a local rhythmic effect: banned, jailed, exiled or dead), is arbitrarily re-shuffled to become "dead...banned...jailed...exiled". This provides

slight but typical evidence that the form of the poem is not internally motivated, or at least not motivated with the degree of intensity customary in the medium. The poetic function of form itself, as manifested in "the well-ordered shape of the text", has been subordinated to the more urgent priorities projected by the dominant.

Having defined the nature of the object of investigation, we ought to have cleared the way for it to project its own criteria of judgement. But even this act of definition is fraught with evaluative bias: merely to describe Matthews' poem as "unpoetic" is to bring in a flagrant pejorative. It would seem that we have unavoidably come full circle to an endorsement of Lindfors' article of faith: "If message becomes more important than method, literary art suffers". A Marxist explanation of this circularity would point to the fact that Lindfors' manifesto is based on certain assumptions ultimately deriving from a specific (orthodox, Western) conception of the relations between an author and his society. The Western literary tradition assumes that a rift between the writer and society at large is a necessary precondition for the production of good or 'high' art. As a result of his specialization and premises of cultural and intellectual elitism which validate his enterprise, the literary critic has a vested interest in confirming and perpetuating this rift. Thus when he is confronted by literature which challenges his assumptions -- Matthews is a 'popular' writer, in the original sense of the word -- he will apply critical methods which are inappropriate, and therefore tendentious, rather than attempt to open up a new methodology. The preceeding analysis of Matthews' work is unintelligible and therefore irrelevant to the people

for whom he is writing in the first place. It constitutes an act of cultural annexation, whose immediate function is self-legitimative, and whose ultimate function is to legitimate the power of the social class which owns the means of economic production; in other words, to support the system which is the subject of Matthews' protest.

To counter this attack, the critic must reaffirm the essential autonomy of literary art. Literary creation is governed by its own intrinsic laws: consequently, if a writer elects to write in a recognised genre -- such as the novel or short story -- he automatically elects also to participate in the aesthetic system which defines that genre. Or better, his decision to work with a bourgeois artistic form means that, even if he rejects the bourgeois aesthetics which define that form, he must refer to them. Thus we secure a place for art itself, a place which disappears when we accept that the only proper evaluative standard is the immediate effect of a literary work on the social well-being of the people. For then we may never ask why a work is successful or popular, or the reverse: we must deal solely with its effects. The consequence is not literary criticism, but its avoidance; the critic may as well forget about art and accept the designation of political apologist or social engineer. This argument is sound, but it is narrow, and in this context will only serve to confirm its proponent's partiality and compound his vulnerability. The trouble is that one cannot allow for the possibility of a valid 'popular' literature while at the same time assuming the existence of absolute, immanent aesthetic principles, for to do so is also to make certain unjustifiable assumptions about the audience of that 'popular' literature. It is obvious that

like "Baby, that's the way it is". "Tribute to a Humble Man" and "Was it worth it?"[76] are aimed at a black (Coloured) mass audience. So let us suppose an unsophisticated reader, a labourer whose literary experience is as limited as his leisure time, confined to, say, a few pulp novels, the newspaper and an occasional *fotoverhaal*. Can we legitimately credit him with the sort of literary discretion which is developed by constant access to high- or middlebrow literary art and continually honed by a culturally enriched environment? Can we even assume on his behalf a nice discernment in questions touching the "formal realism" of the "low mimetic mode",[77] such as those of probability and plausibility, which were invoked in the assessment of Matthews' story? It is important to stress that these concepts are peculiarly *literary*, and presuppose a degree of specifically literary sophistication, in this case, a measure of familiarity with the conventions of literary realism. To affirm that literature is answerable to its own laws, and that the writer violates them at the cost of his art, is to *assume* a reader who will recognize and be offended by that violation. In other words, it is to unilaterally impose a system of values deriving from one's own apperception of aesthetic valency.

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[76] *The Park and Other Stories*, pp. 45-50 and 12-19 respectively.

[77] The terms appear here with the force given them by Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel* and Northrop Frye in *The Anatomy of Criticism*, respectively.

To accept this argument does not by any means entail throwing the entire apparatus of formalist criticism overboard. It does involve a recognition of the limitations of formalism in the evaluation of certain kinds of literature, limitations which are ultimately ideologically determined. The judgment that "Baby, that's the way it is" is bad literature is not invalid but it is inappropriate, because to judge Matthews' work in terms of an "aesthetic ideology" which he has deliberately jettisoned is inappropriate.

But this does not wholly satisfy. For Matthews it is clear that message is indeed more important than art. And it is on this very ground that our criticism of his work holds good. In real life, political commitment is a difficult and dangerous undertaking. It makes demands of the individual's moral and physical courage which few are able, and even fewer are willing to meet. To reduce it to the level of the comic strip, where political salvation appears to be simply a question of learning the right slogans and knowing who your enemy is, is inadmissably glib and irresponsible, and above all, false to experience. We call any art inferior if it reduces, over-simplifies, or trivializes complex human issues, because it impoverishes the humanity of both producer and consumer. One can argue that there will be time enough for culture and the arts of peace once the political problem has been solved, but right now "You've got to strike a blow/To have your liberty". But is Matthews' portrayal of that problem sufficiently complex, or profound, or truthful, to equip the reader to strike that blow, when he comes face to face with the hydra-headed reality? Besides, no political reversal has ever ushered in a moral millenium, and there never was a better time for writing well than now. And thinking of the future, we have to acknowledge that this is short-lived writing, sustained only by its topicality.

Future writers will search in vain for a "usable past" in this sort of work. They are far more likely to turn to the major autobiographies of Abrahams and Hutchinson, Mphahlele and Modisane, or the journalism of Motsisi, Matshikiza and Themba. In the meantime, as will be argued in the last chapter of this study, it seems that these modes of non-fiction will be of far more value to the committed writer and his society. In a discussion of Naipaul's "history based on the... principle of 'severe and imaginative reconstruction'", *The Loss of El Dorado*, Professor A.J. Gurr comments;

> Commitment to change is a *sine qua non* in developing cultures and for that writers will not find the novel, a vehicle of description and interpretation as it is, their best medium. What lies beyond there is yet another question to beg, except that I would suggest an extension to the Naipaul practice of dropping the traditional barriers between fiction and fact. I cannot see a considerable future for the traditional forms of fiction in conditions of drastic social and political change.[78]

Mutatis mutandis, Gurr's diagnosis is equally valid for South Africa today. Of the current generation of writers, it is purveyors of "faction" like Mirian Tlali in her *Muriel at Metropolitan* who appear to be making the most immediately *and* enduringly useful contribution to black South African letters.

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78 "Third-World Novels: Naipaul and After," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 7, No.1 (1972), 12.

CHAPTER TWO

Jurij Tynjanov pointed out that historical investigations of literature fall into two main types, "the investigation of the genesis of literary phenomena, and the investigation of the evolution of a literary order, that is, of literary changeability".[1] The two are complementary, and depending on the orientation of the literary fact, the student of literature will find sometimes the former, and sometimes the latter, of more value in the historical explanation of literary phenomena.

The question of the genesis of black South African literature has only recently begun to receive attention, notably in the pioneering work of T.J. Couzens.[2] The most obvious reason for this long neglect is the tendency of the Eurocentric tradition to relegate such considerations to the far periphery of the critical orbit. For standard critical purposes, it has sufficed to acknowledge the presence of a reality outside the

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[1] "On Literary Evolution," *Readings in Russian Poetics* (op.cit.), p.67.

[2] See, i.a., "The Black Press and Black Literature in South Africa 1900-1950," *English Studies in Africa*, 19, No.2 (1976), 93-99; "The Social Ethos of Black Writing in South Africa 1920-1950," in *Aspects of South African Literature* (op.cit.), pp. 66-84.

printed page by observing that black South Africans write the way they do because the system is the way it is, that their work constitutes a "reflection of, and response to, their environment".[3] Although Couzens and Sole have demonstrated the utter inadequacy of this kind of formulation (regardless of whether one accepts the materialist premises of their methodology), it nevertheless alerts us to the fact that what we are faced with is an unusually unmediated literature. Its history is shaped to a far greater extent by what Tynjanov calls the "modifying" or "deforming" effects of social and political factors than by the immanent evolutionary mutation of aesthetic systems.[4] The Formalist concept of a literary history of forms largely independent of other historical series is therefore of little value in the explanation of this tradition, whose evolutionary dialectic is so obviously propelled by extrinsic factors.

Yet the relations between a literary order and its environment cannot be simply causal, since literature, as both aesthetic system and social institution, is not reducible to any other system and cannot be the simple derivative of any other system. These relations -- which Ejxenbaum defines as those of correspondence, interaction, dependency and conditionality[5] -- are realized in the mediation of certain contiguous

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[3] Bernth Lindfors, "Post-War Literature in English by African Writers from South Africa: A Study of the Effects of Environment Upon Literature," p.59. Arthur Maimane describes this inevitability from the writer's point of view in "Can't You Write About Anything Else," *Présence Africaine*, 80 (1971), 123-26.

[4] "On Literary Evolution," pp. 69,77

[5] Boris M Exjenbaum, "Literary Environment," *Readings in Russian Poetics*, p.61.

communicative systems, loosely conceived as the various forms of written verbal communication. Consequently, as Tynjanov notes, "The study of evolution must move from the literary system to the nearest correlated systems, not to the distant, even though major systems".[6] Roland Barthes describes these "correlated systems" as "a general system of subcodes -- each one of which is defined by its differences, its remoteness and its uniformities in regard to other subcodes..."[7]. The subcode nearest to literature in the present context is that of journalism, and this proximity is multifaceted.

One of the more conspicuous facets is a simple function of the "literary mode of production".[8] The predominance of the short story in black South African literature of the fifties and early sixties has been frequently remarked. The short story is a form particularly suited to the purposes of the protest writer. Properly handled, its concentrated brevity can generate an emotional focus of great intensity; and since there is no room for the detailed treatment or development of character, the protagonists and antagonists naturally tend to assume the quasi-anonymity of representative types and thereby facilitate the dramatization of their social and political significance. But it is not only the propagandist who has found the short story a congenial medium. Ezekiel Mphahlele is the originator and most eloquent proponent of the theory that "the stringent

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6 "On Literary Evolution," p.77

7 "Literature as Rhetoric," *Sociology of Literature and Drama* (op.cit.), p.197.

8 One of the "categories for a materialist criticism" isolated by Terry Eagleton in *Criticism and Ideology*, cited in Isabel Hofmeyr,"'Problems of creative writers': A Reply," *Work in Progress*, 2 (Nov. 1977), 34.

socio-political conditions to which the African is subjected in South Africa make very difficult the sustained organization of the total personality and effort on the writer's part required for the novel".[9] Mphahlele argues that the short story is a medium particularly suited to and expressive of a "fugitive urban culture".[10] According to Lewis Nkosi, the black writer finds himself trapped within a disturbingly permanent political order, between "a dim and opaquely unfamiliar past" and an inscrutable future. He therefore "seizes upon the moment in time and space as concealing the dramatic, the most arresting truth, about his rootless life".[11]

Yet Nkosi does not find Mphahlele's argument "entirely satisfactory" and claims that "part of the reason [for the absence of longer literary forms] is sheer sloth";

> Also, some magazines have employed such low standards of selection that beginning writers began to get the idea that one could detour from the long and dreary labour of good writing by bashing out a short story in a matter of a day or two and getting it published immediately.[12]

Nkosi's observation is an indirect reminder that the popular press provided virtually the only medium for publication available to black writers (writing in English) at this time. In spite of enormous increases in

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[9] "South Africa," International Symposium on the Short Story: Part Three, *Kenyon Review*, 31 (1969), 476. The idea first appears in *The African Image* (1962), pp. 37-38.

[10] ibid. p.474.

[11] "African Fiction, Part I: South Africa -- Protest," *Africa Report*, 7, No.9 (1962), 3.

[12] ibid., p.6.

black literacy and literary activity, it is signal that no black creative writer was first published in book form in South Africa for practically two decades. If a "beginning writer" wanted a wide and immediate audience (and who does not?), he wrote short stories and submitted them to magazines such as *Drum*, *Zonk* or *Our Africa*. Besides providing a ready outlet for literary creativity, these periodicals undoubtedly helped to bring it into being. They offered the explicit encouragement of frequent solicitation and regular competitions, as well as the incentive of substantial financial reward and a measure of celebrity for the successful writer. They also offered the implicit inducement of a 'protected market' and a 'closed' and familiar audience to aspirant but diffident writers, quite apart from the "low standards of selection" mentioned by Nkosi. Thus the popular magazines may be partially credited with providing the initial stimulus to what has aptly been described as South Africa's black literary Renaissance.[13] Because of limitations of space and format, the periodicals naturally encouraged the shorter literary forms. There were a few serials in *Drum*, but they were usually written so that each episode was more or less independent of its fellows.[14] Mphahlele's remarks about the short-windedness of the black South African writer apply equally to his working-class readers, most of whom had neither time nor money for novels.

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[13] N.W. Visser, "South Africa: The Renaissance That Failed," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 11, No.1 (1976), 42-57.

[14] e.g. Mphahlele's serial about the Lesane family which began with "Down the Quiet Street." Episode 3 is billed as "another complete story in this Newclare series", *Drum*, January 1957, p.61.

And while some poetry was published, readership was geared rather towards short fiction because, as Rive notes, it was "presumably more accessible and intelligible" to a relatively unsophisticated audience.[15] Thus the matrix provided by the popular press (including 'political' publications like *New Age* and *Fighting Talk*) resulted in a literary mode of production which established the short story as the fashionable, logical, even inevitable form for writers to begin with. By the end of the decade, there were signs that gifted writers -- who, like so many novelists, had tested their strength in the short story -- had begun to essay the longer, more demanding form. *The Classic* was publishing extracts from novels-in-progress; *A Walk in the Night, Emergency, The Marabi Dance,* and several autobiographies were in the pipeline; Hutchinson, Maimane and Modisane were reputed to have written novels (which, sadly, remain unpublished), and several other writers had at least begun novels which might have been completed had it not been for the political crises and steadily worsening conditions which forced them into exile or silence, or both.[16]

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[15] Richard Rive, "Black Poets of the Seventies," *Selected Writings* (op.cit.), p.75. The reason for the re-emergence of black writing in the 70's as poetry, rather than prose, has been explained by Nadine Gordimer as the result of the black writer's "subconscious search for a form less vulnerable" to censorship, a more oblique form of protest. (*The Black Interpreters* [Johannesburg: Spro-Cas/Ravan, 1973], p.52). Poetry is paradoxically also a more direct form of statement, and the transition from the short story to the poem is firmly anchored in the rise of Black Consciousness and concomitant adjustments of "aesthetic ideology" (another of Eagleton's "categories for a materialist criticism" in *Criticism and Ideology*).

[16] For example, Casey Motsisi's recently published *Casey & Co: Selected Writings* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1978) includes "Ethel, an unfinished novel," which the Editor describes as a "somewhat semi-autobiographical work".

Besides having a decisive influence on the forms of black writing of the fifties, the press as publication outlet also had a conditioning effect on its content. There were two distinct genres of periodical publishing short fiction: the politically moderate white-owned press, aimed specifically at a black mass audience, of which *Drum* is the best-known example; and the independent leftist political press, both liberal (*Africa South*) and radical (*New Age, Fighting Talk*). Bernth Lindfors has suggested the influence of this situation on the orientation of the black writer's fiction:

> If he writes for magazines such as *Drum*, he writes for an audience that wants entertainment, excitement and diversion.... If he writes for liberal or radical publications, he writes for an audience that expects strong opinions, loud complaints and commitment to a cause.[17]

Although valid, this analysis ignores the role of editorial policy in guiding or even dictating public literary taste. Ezekiel Mphahlele recalls that as literary editor for *Drum* he felt constantly constrained by "the pressure of 'policy' through the editor": he was expected to "let in the wet sentimental sexy stories and tough crime stories".

> I tried to argue with the proprietor whenever he interviewed me that *Drum* had plunged into a reading world which hadn't developed any definite magazine taste (the non-European readership); that it should produce healthy material in an original style whenever possible and, in a sense, dictate what the public should read, without necessarily being snobbish and intellectual. He told me that it wasn't *Drum's* mission.[18]

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[17] "Post-War Literature in English by African Writers From South Africa," p.55.

[18] *Down Second Avenue* (London: Faber, 1959), p.188.

The literary taste of *New Age*, on the other hand, was always guided by socialist ideology. It found expression in a lusty tradition of polemical book reviews[19] and a preference for short stories that were openly critical of the political system.

Thus Lindfors is not greatly overstating the case when he contends that "the African writer has had to choose between writing melodramatic literature for *Drum* and writing protest literature for South African liberal publications".[20] And, while exercising due caution in respect of the causality assumed by Lindfors, we may safely conclude that the press as publication outlet had a considerable conditioning effect on both formal and orientational aspects of black South African writing during the fifties.

However, in a recent paper Isabel Hofmeyr proposes a much more extensive relationship between literature and journalism in this context.[21]

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19 Some such reviews relevant to this study include "Peter Abrahams' Novel of the Great Trek" (*Wild Conquest*), *The Guardian*, 9 Aug. 1951, p.6, "Road to Nowhere" (Peter Abrahams' *The Path of Thunder*), *The Clarion*, 24 July 1952, p.4, "A Coloured Tragedy?" (Gerald Gordon's *Let the Day Perish*), *Advance*, 13 Nov. 1952, p.7, "Beating His Own Drum" (Anthony Sampson's *Drum: A Venture into the New Africa*), *New Age*, 6 Sept. 1956. Mphahlele records his anger at a review of his *Man Must Live* in *The Guardian*, which berated him for the lack of 'political commitment' in his stories, in *Down Second Avenue*, pp.165-6.

20 "Post-War Literature in English by African Writers from South Africa," p.55. Of course, this distinction is not absolute. There was some protest writing in *Drum*, and not all the *New Age* fiction was hot propaganda.

21 "'Problems of Creative Writers': A Reply," *Work in Progress*, 2 (Nov. 1977), 31-37.

Ms. Hofmeyr rejects Kelwyn Sole's claim that

> Breaking with the previous written tradition, without literary heroes or moral examples, the writers of the fifties set out to forge a new literary tradition through autobiographies, novels, short stories, plays and poems,

on the ground that

> ...people do not merely 'forge' new traditions, rather any new forms or permutations grow out of pre-existing conditions and have specific historical antecedants.

Hofmeyr cites the examples of drama, "which grows out of ritual and church procedure", the novel "out of satire and essays", and the movie "out of primitive slide shows". Acknowledging that this "law" is not definitive but a "general rule of thumb", Ms. Hofmeyr goes on to ask:

> Bearing this in mind, to what extent was this tradition of the 50's new? It would rather appear that it grew out of a previous newspaper tradition of columns, descriptive pieces and stories.[22]

This is an interesting hypothesis which, as we shall see, contains a certain measure of truth, but Hofmeyr's argument is confused and wildly unbalanced by the weight of the methodology she brings to bear.

In the first place, her objection to Sole's statement is based on a mis-reading. The point Sole makes is that the 50's generation "*set out* to forge a new literary tradition", not that they did. In fact, part of the thrust of Sole's argument in "Problems of Creative Writers in South Africa" was to demonstrate the continuity of their writing with that of "the previous written tradition". The writers themselves were acutely

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[22] ibid., pp.34-5.

conscious of the newness of the experience they had to communicate, the experience of a deracinated, urbanized ghetto community which had grown up to the waking nightmare of apartheid, a community to which they at once belonged and did not belong. Lewis Nkosi describes the distance his generation perceived between it and its predecessor:

> It is the indescribable vanity of every generation to believe that its young men and women are somewhat more beautiful, more plausible, certainly more perceptive and courageous than their elders, who are always assumed to have failed their young.... In South Africa this mutual antipathy and mutual denigration between the generations are made more painful by the greatly varied nature of the challenges presented by each era, so that when responses are seen to be different the war between the young and the old is afforded extra emotion.[23]

Of course, it is virtually a truism that each generation -- and this applies especially to writers -- defines itself in terms of its self-conscious rejection of the attitudes and values of the previous generation. A writer's work, as an assertion of self, is inevitably a kind of reaction to what he perceives to be not of himself, of his time and place, and the strength of that reaction measures his determination to resolve what Harold Bloom has called his "anxiety of influence".[24] Thus Nkosi and his contemporaries react against a tradition of genteel romanticism and polite protest, of works like *Cry the Beloved Country*, just as today James Matthews can name Adam Small's poem "Die Here het geskommel en die dice het verkeerd geval" as the epitomy of what he has rejected in his own work.[25]

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[23] *Home in Exile*, p.3.

[24] *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (London: O.U.P., 1975).

[25] In an interview, February 1976.

Yet although the writer may see himself as the iconoclast, demolishing to build anew, there is, as Hofmeyr correctly points out, a necessary evolutionary continuity between his work and that of his predecessors. But at this point Ms. Hofmeyr's argument goes awry. Referring to the "tradition" of the fifties, she notes that "new forms or permutations grow out of pre-existing conditions and have specific historical antecedents", and adduces as evidence the evolution of three artistic genres: the novel, the drama and the movie. These are basic modes of intelligibility in terms of which we naturalize an enormously various range of works of art. What, we may ask, is "new" about the "autobiographies, novels, short stories, plays and poems" of the fifties? There is nothing generically new about them, nor is there anything new about their appearance in black South African writing. What is new is their profusion, which may be attributed, in part, to the immediate effects of the change in the literary mode of production brought about by the new mass-oriented popular press at home and an increasingly curious audience abroad; and to the indirect effects of the social and political changes accompanying the rise of apartheid, not least of which were the conditions which made possible the existence of a relatively close-knit and homogeneous urban community of black artists and intellectuals. What is also new, of course, is the content of the writing, its characteristic styles and concerns. Hofmeyr seems to have used the admittedly problematic term "form" so loosely that she has confused it with the aspect of literature to which it is traditionally opposed. But her claim is, after all, that far from being new, the "tradition of the 50's... grew out of a previous newspaper tradition of columns, descriptive pieces and stories". If Hofmeyr is claiming that South Africa witnessed a re-enactment of the birth of a literary genre,

the short story, from the piecing together of a tradition of journalistic columns, descriptive pieces and sketches, then her argument cannot be taken seriously. In any case, her terms of reference include novels, plays, poems and autobiographies. There is no need to seek specifically South African literary or quasi-literary antecedents in order to account for the forms, styles, or even themes characteristic of the *Drum* era. The notion that literature is produced in response to other literature has as much validity here as in any other context, and the models which present themselves to the creative writer are limited only by the extent of his reading. In their autobiographical writings, the *Drum* authors acknowledge 'influences' ranging from Shakespeare to Oscar Wilde, from Sir Walter Scott to Leslie Charteris. But by far the most direct inspiration came from a literature produced in similar circumstances in response to similar conditions on the other side of the Atlantic. Black American writing provided a precedent for a literature of protest, as well as ready-fashioned modes of self-perception and the "literary heroes" to whom Nkosi attached so much importance.[26] According to Richard Rive, protest writing of the fifties and sixties

> had its roots in the writing -- especially the Harlem Rennaissance prose -- of the black American just prior to the Second World War. Writers such as Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, Countee Cullen, Ralph Ellison and especially Richard Wright had a major effect on Peter Abrahams (which we see especially in his first collection of short stories *Dark Testament*), Ezekiel Mphahlele, Alex La Guma, myself and others.[27]

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[26] *Home and Exile*, p.17.

[27] *Selected Writings*, p.74. Rive's short fiction owes a special debt to Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children*.

What Hofmeyr is correct in drawing our attention to is the example afforded the 50's writers by the institution of an outspoken black press with a vigorous tradition of polemical and satirical journalism. The columns and descriptive sketches of journalists like Motsisi ("On the beat"), Matshikiza ("With the lid off") and La Guma ("Up my alley") may certainly be regarded as a continuation, with the injection of a new 'township' idiom, of a long-established tradition of humorous and trenchantly witty columnists with mass appeal.

More difficult to isolate are the kinds of mutual "influence" which result from the parallel careers of so many of these writers, journalists by profession but artists by vocation. Couzens has suggested that "newspapers doubtlessly influenced the writer's style and approach", chiefly through an "emphasis on public pronouncement" and the "entrenching of certain qualities of phrasing and expression".[28] Sole reminds us that many writers became journalists not because they particularly liked the job but because, apart from school teaching, there was very little else going for a black 'man of letters',[29] and Rive notes that some literary creativity was undoubtedly "siphoned off" into journalism.[30] This helps to explain the emergence in the late 50's of a distinctive brand of imaginative reportage, especially prevalent in political periodicals such as *Fighting Talk* and *New Age*, which bears a resemblance to what has become known as

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28 "The Black Press and Black Literature in South Africa 1900-1950," pp.96,98. Mphahlele writes that while working as a journalist on *Drum*, "my prose was suffering under severe journalistic demands" (*Down Second Avenue*, p.194). c.f. E.N. Obiechina's comments on the influence of newspapers on Nigerian popular writing, *Onitsha Market Literature* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1972), p.23.

29 Kelwyn Sole, "Class, Continuity and Change in Black South African Literature," p.25.

30 In a letter to the present writer of 26.11.76.

New Journalism.[31] This reportage, whose appearance appears to lend credence to Hofmeyr's thesis, is characterized by scenic presentation and a strong dramatic element, and like so much New Journalism, it is ideologically as well as artistically self-conscious. The reporter appears to be attempting two things: to extract political significance from humdrum copy, sometimes from everyday situations and events that would not normally even make the news; and, reciprocally, to re-introduce the human element into issues which have been quite de-personalised by the glib formulas of political rhetoric. This description reads like a brief for a *literature engagé*, and it reminds us that side by side with this creative reportage we have short stories which are dismissed as "journalistic fact parading outrageously as imaginative literature". The signs are out that some sort of generic *rapprochement* has occurred. We should not be at all surprised. The press has long been the single most influential public agent of political socialization in South Africa, and political socialization-- meaning the process whereby values and beliefs are translated into political behaviour-- is what protest fiction is all about. In terms of "the progressive changeability of form/function interrelationships", the ongoing dialectic of form and function, concurrence of the verbal function of journalism and literature within the same epoch and social context ought to entail some detree of formal convergence.[32]

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[31] See N.W. Visser, "South Africa: The Rennaissance that Failed," p.49.

In fact, as the ensuing argument will serve to show, the resemblance is superficial.

[32] Jurij Tynjanov, "On Literary Evolution," p.73.

A brief comparison of four pieces of writing -- three articles and one short story -- inspired by the great bus boycotts in 1957 affords some insight into the nature and degree of this convergence.[33]

Ruth First's article, "The Bus Boycott", appeared in the July-September issue of *Africa South*, some months after a settlement to the fare dispute had been negotiated. It therefore could not fulfil the immediately supportive, hortatory function which governs Alfred Hutchinson's "A Stream of Life on Foot" and A. Forbes Robinson's "They Walk for Us". This, together with the fact that she was writing for a somewhat more critical and largely "external" audience, helps to explain why Ms. First's article is the least emotional and most analytic of the three. Her intention is "to present the reality" of the dispute between PUTCO and the strikers, and although that reality is tendentiously conveyed, her arguments are almost everywhere backed up with verifiable evidence. Yet the opening paragraphs of the article make it clear that the writer's interest is not confined to mere facts and statistics:

> "The tiger has fallen," the people cheered. The streets were strangely quiet. First the great lumbering green buses of the largest transport organisation for Africans in the country travelled empty along the route; later they were withdrawn altogether.
>
> But for five and six hours every day endless streams of walkers filled the pavements. Over the rise that obscures Alexandra Township from the main road came the eruption of workers in the dawn hours when mists and brazier fires mingle indistinguishably together. End to end the road was

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[33] Ruth First, "The Bus Boycott," *Africa South*, 1, No.4 (1957), 55-64; Alfred Hutchinson, "A Stream of Life on Foot," *Fighting Talk*, March 1957, pp.3-4; A. Forbes Robinson, "They Walk for Us," *Fighting Talk*, March 1957, p.5; James Matthews, "Azikwelwa," *Africa South*, 3, No.1 (1958), 118-123.

> filled with shadowy, hurrying figures. Then the forms thinned out as the younger men with the firmest, sprightly step drew away from the older people, the women, the lame.
>
> In the late afternoons and early evenings, the same crowds turned their backs on the city and again took to the roads. Down the hill the footsloggers found it easier (though by the tenth and eleventh weeks of the boycott many shoes were worn to pitiful remnants), the spindly-legged youngsters trotted now and then to keep up, the progress of the weary women was slower still, here a large Monday washing bundle carried on the head, there a paraffin tin, or the baby tied securely to the back.
>
> In the pelting rain, through the suddenly fierce storms of the Johannesburg summer, running the gauntlet of police patrols, the boycotters walked on. [34]

Ms. First is here attempting to convey the human reality of what she will subsequently argue to be a political watershed. The passage is dominated by a sense of the epic proportions of the boycott and the sheer courage and determination of the walkers who made it work. The carefully modulated prose style, the deliberate evocation of atmosphere, above all, the kinds of selection and omission and the degree of detail in the description (e.g. the shoes that are worn out with walking), begin to create a world sufficiently dense and richly textured to stand alone. The extract could easily be setting the scene for a fictional narrative. In reading it we are apt to experience that familiar sense of impatient anticipation which accompanies our waiting for the characters of a fictive work to be introduced so that the story can get under way. But of course it is precisely the absence of fictional characters, or fictive statement-subjects, as Käte Hamburger would call them,[35] that precludes any question of fictionalization here.

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[34] "The Bus Boycott," p.55.

[35] *The Logic of Literature*, trans. Marilynn J. Rose (Bloomington and London: Indiana Univ. Press), passim.

James Matthews' short story "Azikwelwa" ("We will not ride") is similarly inspired by a sense of the human dignity earned by the walkers in their corporate resistance to an inhuman bureaucracy.[36] Matthews imagines a Coloured man like himself in the boycott situation, a man who does not have to walk (as his European employer reminds him) because he is "not one of them". Jonathan's decision to join the daily column of walkers and his growing commitment to their cause is not explained in terms of ideological precept or economic causality, but through the juxtaposition of images and the emotional logic of the individual consciousness. "Azikwelwa" is undoubtedly an early manifestation of Matthews' commitment to black unity in South Africa and its conscientizing function is to promote solidarity between Coloureds and Africans. Nevertheless we may say that while "The Bus Boycott" is Ruth First's story about the strike, "Azikwelwa" is Jonathan's story. Ms. First's article is a transitive speech act, a reality-statement firmly embedded in a praxis; Matthews's story intransitively recounts or redoubles reality by narrating the experience of a fictive person or character. This experience is narrated in the epic preterite tense, which, according to the useful discriminations of Käte Hamburger in *The Logic of Literature*, displaces the I-Origo out of the system of reality into the field of fiction, that is, transfers the role of statement-subject from the author to fictive personae.[37] However urgently

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[36] This fine story also appeared in *Africa South*, but only some eighteen months after the event, and hence its 'news value' was negligible. Matthews was in Cape Town at the time of the boycott and relied on newspaper reports for details of setting, etc.

[37] op. cit., Chapter Three.

this or any protest work refers its reader to the real, it does so only through the mediation of an unreal world of unreal men in action. Once Matthews has yielded up the I-Originality of his discourse to Jonathan and the other characters, he has ushered in a completely different matrix of inter-relationships among himself, his work, and his readers. The validity of his protest no longer depends directly upon his authority as a witness or the cogency of his own arguments: it now depends upon his skill in creating the illusion of reality by endowing his characters with the semblance of life. And this is another way of stating the perennial dilemma of the protest writer. If he marshalls his characters into a transparently didactic plot, he runs the risk of vitiating the *illusion* of reality which endows fiction with the capacity to convince and thus to conscientize in the first place. If, on the other hand, he declines to offer demeaned versions of character and strives to be faithful to life as it is lived, he must show us human beings with doubts as well as convictions (the blacks), with virtues as well as vices (the whites), and situations capable of more than one interpretation. The literary artist cannot have the confidence of the casuist, but the protest writer needs that confidence. To surrender his authority over the presented world to fictive characters is to risk blunting the edge of his protest by blurring the issues involved and dissipating the thrust of the imperative aimed at the reader.

Of the three pieces of journalism, Alfred Hutchinson's "A Stream of Life on Foot" is the most accomplished and, as protest, probably the most effective. Hutchinson simultaneously solves the problem of I- Originality and declares his allegience to the boycotters' cause by adopting the

collective persona of the walkers and writing in the first person plural:

> Yesterday at the square we stood in the dusk -- thousands of us. The stars then were only beginning to appear in the sky. We stood, we sat, and some of us leaned on our bicycles. *Asinamali! Azikwelwa!* We have no money. The buses are not being boarded. We said goodbye to PUTCO then because it said that if we did not ride the buses they would be taken off the road for good. We would walk. We cannot pay the penny: our poverty is not a secret. And so we walk and hear the sizzling tyres of the empty buses and feel the fire in the soles of our feet. (p.3)

As Käte Hamburger has shown, a first person narrative is logically speaking a reality statement, centered in the here-and-now of a real rather than a fictive statement-subject.[38] In addition, the temporal vantage point of the statement-subject of Hutchinson's article, as the déictic "Yesterday" indicates, is the present, moreover, a present shared by the contemporary reader. As a result, most of the article is written in the present tense, which naturally adds immediacy and urgency to the complaint and exhortation. Although the register and lexis of the article is elevated and 'literary' to a degree unusual in reportage, the piece is conventionally structured according to the discursive logic of a fully-developed argument:

> They say many of the people live below the breadline: our hunger is no secret. Perhaps the breadline is the gnawing girdle of hunger round our stomachs and our children's stomachs -- the nagging poverty. They say a penny is a trifle; that the bus boycott is all fuss and bother over nothing. They say that the boycott is the work of agitators. Is it not hunger that is the agitator? (p.3)

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[38] ibid., Chapter Five.

There are no fully-developed characters, but Hutchinson does focus on several representative types, such as the toiling washerwoman, the stiff-jointed old man, or the infant on the walking mother's back --

> Little "boycotter" on your mother's back, asleep, crying or gurgling. You will hear it told how we walked in the rain, in the sun, in the morning and evening light. It will be the year of the great bus boycotts that flared up in various places. It will also be the year of the treason trials. You may grow up free from "penny" boycotts ... the poverty like a great black cat ... the petty tyrannies that make a soul scream. (p.4)

However, the individual identity of the baby or the other figures is of no import; even the occasional snatch of dialogue is merely typical and not linked to the particularity of character in the literary way.

Thus although parts of Hutchinson's article are non-factual in that they are unverifiable, he does not begin to fictionalize his material. The narrative portions of the piece are subsumed under the discursive framework of the whole: in any case, the point-of-view and temporal vantage point which mediate these portions secure their praxis-bound intransitivity or status as reality-statement.

A. Forbes-Robinson flirts openly with the temptation to fictionalize, in order to render his account more vivid. "They Walk for Us" is a descriptive sketch based on the sympathy boycott in Port Elizabeth. It begins thus:

> Nearly every householder in New Brighton had held in his hand the leaflet which asked him and his family to take part in this boycott "in sympathy with our brothers on the Reef."
> The organisers could not call the people together and speak to them. Meetings are not allowed.
> Everything depended on the leaflet and the word being passed from mouth to mouth.

> How would the people respond?
> Would they say, "This thing that has happened to our people nearly a thousand miles away, what has it to do with us here in Port Elizabeth?"
> There were people recently moved to site and service, Kwazakhele about whom there was no certainty.
> There were new arrivals at Korsten who had not lived long in a city.
> Only to-morrow would it be known.

Like the opening passage of Ruth First's article, this extract might easily be the beginning of a fictional narrative. The deictic adverb of time in the last sentence marks the tense of "would" as sequential on the epic preterite rather than the simple past, and the epic preterite is a tense which Ms. Hamburger has shown can only be found in fictive discourse. The tranference of I-Originality to fictive statement-subjects seems imminent and we are poised for the entry of the characters. But what we get are the same sorts of anonymous representative types encountered in Hutchinson's article.

> On Monday before the sun had risen, people were starting to walk.
> By seven o'clock there were thousands of people walking.
> Young men and old, women carrying bags or parcels, talked to each other. The more serious listened, trying to gauge the mood of the people.
> Everywhere there were armed policemen sitting in vans.
> The old father over there with the white beard and the worn army coat and the faded felt hat with the crown pointing up. He could have travelled by bus. No he, too, prefers to walk, helped by a stick.
> It was a pleasure to see him, together with the others, in groups in their hundreds, and later in their thousands, walking, walking....

In the last paragraph of this extract the writer has abruptly re-asserted his presence as the statement-subject of the discourse. Reflecting a perhaps half-consciously perceived inconsistency in the logic of the writer's narrative, the article thereafter fragments into a series of

related vignettes, some discursive, some descriptive, some narrative. Forbes-Robinson even introduces a 'character'.

> They have found something wrong with the [sic] Milton Galube's pass.
> He looks very tired when the policeman tells him to "Wait!" Just now they will order him, together with the others, to get into the van. He might have to stay the night in the cells.
> His eyes become rounded with fear.
> In the right hand pocket of his coat is a bottle of medicine.
> It is for their sick child who is very ill.
> Milton Galube explains this to a friend and asks him to drop the medicine at his home.
> As he is handing the medicine to a friend a policeman seems to misunderstand and dashes the parcel out of Milton's hand. The bottle falls and breaks.
> The thick liquid lies spilled like clotted blood on the grey-blue road.

Whether or not a person by the name of Milton Galube actually exists is immaterial. By choosing to relate his misadventure in the present tense and carefully avoiding verbs of inner action, the writer has conveyed the incident as reality-statement and not fiction. What the reader actually assumes is that the incident, if not factual in all particulars, is sufficiently grounded in fact to be respected as such. By the end of the article, all traces of fictive duplicity have vanished, and the conative function of the article is made starkly explicit in a series of imperatives:

> Along the roads, across the footpaths, endless columns walk.
> They walk for YOU. They walk for ME. They walk for US. Whether you are a University professor, a doctor, a factory owner, whether you are a housewife or a clerk or a house-boy, whether you are Black or White. Whether you are a policeman or a politician. Whether you speak English or Afrikaans or a Bantu language. They walk as a protest.
> Africa stirs ... Africa challenges ... She calls to us in the North, in the South:
> BE NOT AFRAID; SERVE ME TOGETHER; BUILD ME JOINTLY.

The example of Milton Galube indicates that the question of fictionality, in the sense of something not literally true but invented (as opposed to something implausible), does not necessarily enter into the process whereby the reader identifies the text before him as "literary". Unless this information is somehow incorporated into the text, the question of whether or not an object in the presented world has a corresponding source-object in the real world is independent of (though by no means irrelevant to) the process of naturalization. N.W. Visser cites the example of a well-known piece by the marine biologist Archie Carr, "The Black Beach", which won an O. Henry short story prize in 1956.[39] "The Black Beach" was afterwards revealed to be an accurate transcription of real experience ; and as Visser points out, in the absence of information extrinsic to the work, its peculiar status would remain undiscoverable, for all intrinsic signals point to its being an orthodox short story. What induces us to apperceive "The Black Beach" or "Azikwelwa" as fiction and the articles by First and Hutchinson as fact is the manner in which they are presented: it is the peculiarities of the presentational or mediative process which separates fictive from ordinary discourse.

Bernth Lindfors takes La Guma to task for some clumsy polemic in a piece entitled "The Machine",[40] advising that "such blatant protest must be carefully controlled to be effective" for it runs the risk of being "too loud to be eloquent, too heavy-handed to be finely drawn".[41]

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39 *The Novelistic Documentary*, op. cit., pp. 23-24.

40 *Fighting Talk*, October 1956, pp. 8-9.

41 "Post-War Literature in English by African Writers in South Africa." p.59.

The critical response which informs these remarks is determined by the evaluative criteria appropriate to literary or fictive discourse. However, as the following argument will demonstrate, what Lindfors assumes to be a short story is actually a particularly enterprising piece of journalism, typical of the creative reportage appearing in the leftist press in the late 50's. The implications of this misinterpretation are signal, for they cast a damaging aspersion on the very thing that Lindfors is anxious to display: his indifference to the *matter* of the writing and his concentration on the *manner* of its presentation. For if "The Machine" is merely reportage, then Lindfors cannot justify his censure by appealing to the formal demands of what he assumes to be the relevant aesthetic standard, and his quarrel is therefore with the content of the article. Lindfors may in certain circumstances be correct when he alleges that "such blatant protest must be carefully controlled to be effective", but his statement is an unwarranted generalization. Must we not allow for the possibility that some readers might endorse La Guma's diatribe and detect no trace of excess in his writing? They cannot be called to order by the literary critic, for his authority does not extend beyond the borders of his province. What, then, are the features that exclude La Guma's article from the canon of the literary?

The opening paragraph of "The Machine" is most revealing:

> No. 27 Rutger Street, Cape Town, is a wide ugly building with a face of rough unpainted bricks. The guttering along the veranda has come loose and sags at one end, and around the edges of the lifeless doors the brown paint has turned a grimy black. A weather-beaten sign on one wall struggles to be noticed in the drab surroundings: "Native Female Registration." (p.8)

No. 27 Rutger Street, Cape Town, was indeed the address of the Native Female Registration offices in October, 1956, when "The Machine" was published.[42] This in itself has no bearing on the literariness of the writing, but its positioning has. Situated at the very beginning of the article, before the presented world has begun to acquire that autonomous resonance and momentum which sets off the duplicities characteristic of literary discourse, and which attenuates the referentiality of such apparently factual statements, this item of information has the full force of a real-world predication. By giving at least the appearance of immediate verifiability, (and here, as we shall see, La Guma's use of the present tense is crucial), the effect of this item of information is to anchor the writing in a praxis in which reader and writer participate as real rather than fictive people. The transitivity of La Guma's inchoate speech act is reinforced by his use of the present tense. This is of course the logical choice for a factual description, expressing as it does a relation of contemporaneous equivalence between the object described and the act of description. What is significant is that La Guma adheres to the present tense throughout the piece, even when relating human action, while at the same time, as early as the first paragraph, alerting the reader to the fact that he may expect something more than a purely factual account. La Guma's careful evocation of atmosphere in the opening sentences, reflected in his choice of emotive adjectives and verbs (ugly, rough, sags, lifeless, grimy, struggles, drab, etc.), is suggestive of literary design, for it begins to establish the independent integrity of the presented world (and

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42 *Cape Times Cape Peninsula Directory for 1956-57*, p.255.

thus generate a duplicity of context). The use of the present tense in opening set-pieces -- what Hamburger calls the "tabular" present[43] -- is not unusual and what concerns us here is the question of the effect of its preservation throughout "The Machine".

The answer appears to lie in the semantic versatility of the present tense, which allows at least three different functions. The present tense can be used to indicate a unique action taking place now; a repeated customary action; or a generalization without reference to time. By using the present tense La Guma is in a sense freed of the tyranny of time reference while at the same time making the time reference of his description quite unequivocal. By exploiting the multiple semantic ambiguities of the present tense, La Guma is able to make use of some of the techniques of fiction without yielding up his authority as statement-subject to the characters in his presented world, that is, without fictionalizing. If La Guma had used the past tense -- unless he had introduced himself as a first-person narrator within the presented world -- he would have had to have gone to far greater lengths to establish the documentary status of his writing. The sense in which the present tense refers to a unique event occurring in the writer's here-and-now lends immediacy and dramatic impact to "The Machine"; insofar as the present tense refers to a repeated, customary action -- re-inforced by sentences such as "Daily the machines grind away...", it makes the article 'open-ended', suggesting that now, even as the reader reads, "the machine" is dealing out its ruthless dispensation. And finally, insofar as the present is an atemporal tense, it allows La Guma to dispense with any

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43 *The Logic of Literature*, p.77.

specific time reference and admits entrance to the world of the imagination where it is possible to describe doors as "lifeless" and men as robots. It is worth adding that all the pieces of in-depth reportage by La Guma and Hutchinson dating from this period have the author's here-and-now as temporal vantage point, and most are written in the present tense.

Thus La Guma's use of the present tense exercises an important control over the complex of interrelationships involved in the act of communication. A yet more telling factor is La Guma's manipulation of point-of view, for the present tense can fictionalize just as effectively as the preterite, provided the fictive duplicities are established and the I-Origo is transferred into the here-and now of the characters in the narrative. This La Guma is careful to avoid. In the second paragraph of "The Machine", he refers to the "ponderous administrative machinery which *is supposed to* operate the soul-destroying intricacies of the pass-law system (for African women) in Cape Town". (my italics). The effect of "supposed" at this juncture is revealing. It serves to re-define the distance between the statement-subject and the object of the statement, and so remind the reader of the nature of the link between real and presented worlds. The force of "supposed" is to attribute the statement to a subject who does not recreate or redouble reality, but only comments upon it. The same tendency is conspicuous in La Guma's description of the villain of the piece, whom we encounter in paragraph 4:

> The official behind the counter is red-faced. It is difficult to judge, merely by looking at him, whether he is angry or just hot. His necktie has been loosened and his waist-coat unbuttoned. A row of pens and pencils from a tiny fence across his breast, as if it had been erected there to keep out all feeling of friendliness, or even minute sparks of pity or compassion. He is

> unemotional, expressionless, a robot, part of the vast machinery created to enslave a people. Beyond the counter he sees a row of women with dark faces. Does he think of them as women? Are they human? Does he hate them? It is difficult to read behind the ruddy face, the fine blonde down on his cheeks, the pale hair. Perhaps the machine mind registers everything simply as other machines. The questions have become stereo-typed, like a record being played over and over again.

The shifting point of view in this passage reflects one of the problems always confronting the protest writer. La Guma is clearly anxious to convey a perfectly unambiguous interpretation of the scene he is describing. At the same time, he appears reluctant to compromise altogether whatever claims to objective validity he has thus far established for his article. Thus his vituperation is tempered by a series of distancing devices. In the first three sentences, the point of view is that of a neutral observer: the description is limited to features which are indiscriminately accessible. The transition from the physical to the political, from observation to interpretation, is achieved by means of a simile: an "as-if" formula which foregrounds the metaphorical nature of the statement and keeps it firmly anchored in the reality of the writer's here-and-now. That La Guma is not creating an alternative reality, that the presented world is not only symmetrical but identical with the real world, is confirmed by the questions which follow. These questions, like the use of "supposed" mentioned earlier, and the "It is difficult to say..." and "Perhaps the machine..." constructions later in the paragraph, evidence a hesitancy before states-of-affairs which is alien to the creator of fiction. They pre-suppose an existent reality independent of the immediate context wherein the reader may check the validity of the writer's perception and conjecture. The writer of fiction does not conjecture, he *creates*: La Guma is inviting the reader to co-perceive, to share his point of view

as statement-subject. The second question, "Are they human?" qualifies this point of view because it is the one occasion in the article where La Guma surrenders the I-Origo to a presented figure. We are momentarily allowed direct access to the consciousness of "the machine" as the mediating presence of the writer withdraws. It is significant that La Guma immediately re-asserts that presence and resumes his role of interpreting intermediary. To permit his readers entry to the consciousness of the unsympathetic official would destroy the whole conceit, for a machine does not have a consciousness. The one thing that La Guma cannot afford to acknowledge is that the official is human, that he is a sentient being acting with accordance with reasoned motives; for then the distinction between "them" and "us" is not so clear-cut after all, and the reader may just begin to feel a tremor of pity for this alienated functionary, daily grinding away at his thankless, mechanical task.

That this official is not permitted to become an individual, i.e. a character, provides further evidence of the non-fictive nature of La Guma's writing. What little narrative there is in the article revolves around an encounter between the official and a black woman whose papers are out of order. She, too, remains just "a woman", a typical figure whose individuality is of no account. Of course, this anonymity is in a sense a positive signal of the dehumanizing effects of the system in which she is caught up. But even anonymous entities live in minutely discriminated time and space, and what is at issue here is the lack of this discrimination or particularity in the presentation of the human figures in "The Machine". Again, this points to the fact that La Guma is not attempting to redouble reality (and thereby establish a duplicity of context), but to change it. Whatever *illusion* there may be of an

independent, fictional reality is surely shattered by statements such as these:

> ...the soul-destroying intricacies of the pass-law system (for African women) in Cape town.
>
> ... part of the vast machinary created to enslave a people.
>
> It has no feeling for a woman who cannot prove how long she has been living in the area and so must be torn from her family to be removed to a strange place far from things which have become part of her life.

It is perhaps too vague to say that there is something "non-literary" about the language which La Guma is using here, but that is one's immediate reaction. This is the language of telling rather than showing, of interpretation rather than creation. Its 'non-literary' feel reflects the non-literary logic which informs it. Like the burden of the Black Consciousness propaganda in Matthews' "Baby, that's the way it is", but to a more acute degree, the presented world of "The Machine" simply cannot sustain the implications of these judgements. The issues which they raise are 'settled' not in the context of the presented world, where they are contingent, but in the context of the real world, where they are crucial. Severed from this latter context -- which is not "life" but a specific social and political system -- La Guma's article is an unintelligible fragment. It seems that the only way in which "The Machine" might still achieve literary status -- as a failure -- is if the author were to reveal that he was actually attempting a self-parody by exploiting an ironic distance between his own point-of-view and that of his narrating persona: a possibility too bizarre to be contemplated.

Although La Guma has availed himself of some of the resources of the literary craftsman in ordering and interpreting his material, he has

assiduously eschewed "literarifying" this material. This unhappy neologism seems unavoidable if we are to provide for the possibility of a non-fictional work of literary art.[44] La Guma does not literarify because he cannot afford to endow his work with the *appearance* of fiction and thus compromise its documentary premise. In Chapter One we found it convenient to speak of a continuum of communicative possibilities in terms of which literature and reportage differ only in degree. It now appears that the two modes are contraries sharply discriminated from one another by the presence or absence of structural duplicities projected at the level of the speech act. These duplicities are created by the writer's adoption of a specific communicative strategy, and it is only through a deliberate revision of this strategy that a fusion of the modes may be effected. The *rapprochement* between tendentious journalism and protest fiction in the 50's did not result in a new genre of writing -- in the sense that New Journalism is a new genre -- because the writers concerned did not consciously set out to blend the two. And just as the factual reporting is never comprehensively literarified, so the fiction, no matter how insistently it urges its "truth", never resorts to devices of documentation in order to render its referentiality explicit. Isabel Hofmeyr's claim that we witness in the 50's the evolution of a new "form" from the "piecing together" of elements of a "previous newspaper tradition", is shown to be without foundation, while it emerges as a corollary that protest fiction, although in some ways a 'transitional' and divergent type, remains incontrovertibly literary and requires no special critical concessions at the level of genre.

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[44] Thus N.W. Visser coins the term "novelize" in *The Novelistic Documentary* to describe the treatment of material in the "non-fiction novel".

La Guma's journalism in *New Age* and *Fighting Talk* during the late 50's still makes interesting reading, especially in the light of his subsequent career as a novelist. One of his most memorable in-depth reports is a two-part expose of conditions in Roeland Street jail,[45] which contains several descriptive details, image clusters (especially the idea of the prison world as a jungle in which the strongest animals hold sway), and even whole phrases, which are to be echoed some ten years later in *The Stone Country*. In La Guma's regular column in *New Age*, "Up my Alley", one is surprised by a mischievous and irreverent sense of humour which can be glimpsed once or twice in the short stories, but is never allowed to disturb the severe concentration of the novels.[46] A thorough investigation of La Guma's journalism -- most of which dates from the period which saw the publication of his first short stories -- might well prove as rewarding as any such exploration of an author's raw or partially transmuted source material.

The influence of La Guma's journalistic career on his creative writing is difficult to define with any precision, but the conclusions of Robert Bone in an analogous context are most suggestive. Discussing the naturalistic social protest of the Wright school of black American

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45 "What goes on in Roeland Street Jail" and "Law of the Jungle rules in Jail," *New Age*, Sept. 27 and Oct. 4 1956, respectively.

46 La Guma even wrote and drew a comic strip serial in *New Age*, "Little Libby," which followed the picaresque adventures of one Liberation Chabalala.

novelists in the 1940's, Bone reflects:

> It is not surprising to discover that many of these authors served their literary apprenticeship as newspaper writers. Journalism has traditionally provided a training ground for naturalistic fiction, and the Negro novel is no exception.... Concerned as newspapermen with the sordid side of city life, they were forced to develop that respect for objective detail which is the stamp of literary naturalism.[47]

A "respect for objective detail" is one of La Guma's greatest strengths as a novelist, but it is also in a sense his severest limitation. Truman Capote has remarked that "in reporting one is occupied with literalness and surfaces, with implication without comment -- one can't achieve immediate depths the way one may in fiction".[48] One searches in vain for real psychological or thematic profundity in La Guma's fiction, but of course one can hardly attribute this wholly to the influence of the journalist's habit of perception. Bone quotes John Aldridge's remark that "events occur in wars with such intensity that they need not signify or connote".[49] The pressures of the apartheid system bear down with like intensity, and we can in fairness state that the theme of La Guma's fiction is precisely its subject, for the significance of racial and economic oppression to its victims is its concrete reality, not its idea. Of course, La Guma's work is not devoid of idea: the plot of each novel is structured according to the socio-economic dialectic of Marxist ideology, which re-inforces the priority of the external and the concrete, and naturally entails a sociological rather than a psychological view of character. However,

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47 *The Negro Novel in America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1965), p.157.

48 Quoted in Visser, *The Novelistic Documentary*, p.194.

49 *The Negro Novel in America*, p.157.

La Guma's concentration on externals is a limitation not only in the aesthetic sense, in that it denies him so much of the rich potential of the novel form, but also, as will be argued in Part Two of this study, because it detracts from the conscientizing potential of his work as social protest.

PART II

THE NOVELS OF ALEX LA GUMA

tell us, doctors of philosophy, what are the needs of a man. At least a man needs to be notjailed notafraid nothungry notcold not without love, not a worker for a power he has never seen.
that cares nothing for the uses and needs of a man or woman

John Dos Passos, *The Big Money*

CHAPTER THREE

Before we turn to examine La Guma's first novel, there are two salient factors affecting our critical approach which must be noted here. In Chapter One it was shown that the orientation of the protest work foregrounds the role of the reader and defines the nature of the relationship which the author must establish between himself and the reader, and between the reader and the presented world, if the work is to fulfil the conative function.

La Guma's novels were not only published abroad, but were actually written in the knowledge that they could not be published or even read in South Africa. La Guma's audience is therefore not a specific but a general one: although the term "socialist realism" has been invoked to describe the mode characteristic of his later fiction, alienated as he was from a local readership, he cannot possibly be credited with having fashioned a genuine proletarian literature. The hypothetical reader of La Guma's work, whose responses are all important to its evaluation, is therefore no different from the imaginary consumer of any contemporary imaginative writing, whom we automatically credit with a measure of literary experience and sophistication.

The second constraint upon our critical approach is related to the first. Any serious criticism must take into account the protest work's "mixed work premise", which means that a consideration of its effectiveness *as protest* must be incorporated into any evaluative judgement. In fact it will be found that the methods of formal analysis and close reading are quite adequate to cope with this idiosyncrasy, because the demands which protest fiction makes upon the artistic skills of the author are essentially no different from those made by 'purer' species of narrative art.

The short stories are not examined here, not because they are inferior -- arguably, La Guma's achievement in the narrowly aesthetic scene is greater in that genre -- but because they exhibit no techniques and explore no themes which are not present, in greater amplitude, in the novels; in short, they make no additional contribution to an evaluation of La Guma's achievement -- as a protest writer -- based solely on the novels. What is worthy of mention is the difficulty La Guma appears to have experienced, noted by several critics, in adapting techniques of narration and characterization developed in the medium of the short story to the demands of the novel. His first extended prose narrative, *A Walk in the Night*, is described for convenience' sake as a novel, but is more properly a novella or a long short story. The same is true of at least his next two works, which despite their greater length, have the spatio-temporal concentration, the "given-ness" and singleness of effect which we normally associate with the nouvelle. This carry-over of short story strategy is a feature which is partly a strength -- La Guma's novels are just as sparely and tightly constructed as his best short stories -- and

partly a weakness, which, as we shall see, severely limits La Guma's imaginative range and demeans the conscientizing impact of his writing.

The discussions of La Guma's first three novels are not complete in themselves and should be read in conjunction with the chapter on *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* and the Conclusion to this study.

A Walk in the Night[1] is set in the Cape Town Coloured ghetto of District Six. Michael Adonis, a young Coloured factory hand, has just been sacked from his job for answering back to a white foreman. As the novel opens, Adonis is making his way home through the late afternoon traffic, seething with anger and resentment. After further humiliation at the hands of two white policemen, he gets drunk on cheap wine and vents his frustration on a harmless old man, Doughty, whom he bludgeons to death with a bottle. The corpse is discovered by Willieboy, a feckless small-time crook and a casual acquaintance of Adonis. Willieboy is seen leaving Doughty's room and suspicion falls upon him. Later that night he is spotted by a sadistic white policeman, Raalt, who gives chase and ruthlessly guns him down. Meanwhile Michael Adonis has been observed sneaking away from the scene of the crime by Foxy, leader of a gang of hoodlums, who with thinly-veiled threads of blackmail invites Adonis to join him in a robbery planned for that night. As the novel closes, Adonis seems destined to slide into a career of crime.

The characters in *A Walk in the Night*, like most of La Guma's "human salad",[2] are drawn from the ranks of the socially oppressed and

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[1] *A Walk in the Night* (1962; rpt. in *A Walk in the Night and other stories*, London: Heinemann Educational Books, (1968). All page references are to this edition.

[2] The phraze is first used by La Guma to describe the contents of a remand cell in "Tattoo Marks and Nails," *Black Orpheus* 14 (Feb. 1964), 48, and again in *The Stone Country*, p.80.

culturally deprived. The dehumanizing effects of their environment are measured by the consistently severe limitations which La Guma inflicts on their consciousness. Even Michael Adonis, whose interiority is most fully rendered, experiences only the most primitive appetites and desires, for which he seeks the most immediate gratification in violence and drunkenness. His emotional life is reduced to mere physical sensation as he stalks the streets of District Six, impelled by a "sour knot of smouldering violence within him" (p.26). The force of this recurrent image is literal rather than metaphorical, for La Guma presents his character as object rather than subject, a man in the grip of a relentless determinism which permits him to react, but not act. Together with Willieboy, Doughty, Joe, Greene and the rest, Adonis is a creature of circumstance at the mercy of his own destiny: pushed here and there by social forces which he dimly perceives but does not understand ("'They's always kicking a poor bastard around,'" [p.93]), trying to carve out his life from under the shadow of inscrutable abstractions ("It's the capitalis' system" announces the taxi driver to an unappreciative audience [p.17]) searching for meaning where only meaninglessness is to be found.

But it is not only those on the disadvantaged side of the colour bar who are subject to the ineluctable laws of causality. The white policeman, Raalt -- quite apart from "the pathological structures imposed upon his behaviour by his religion of race"[3] -- endures his own private mental torment in the form of a rankling suspicion that his wife is being unfaithful to him. The causal connection between Raalt's jealous anger

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[3] J.M. Coetzee, "Alex La Guma and the Responsibilities of the South African Writer," p.7.

and his vindictiveness towards the Coloureds of District Six is made explicit when the subject of his interior monologue, "It's enough to make a man commit murder....I'd wring her bloody neck but it's a sin to kill your wife," (p.38) is translated in his next remark to the young driver as: "'I'd like to lay my hands on one of those bushmen bastards and wring his bloody neck'." (p.39).

This apparently gratuitous insight into Raalt's consciousness -- which La Guma takes care to drive home (pp.30-31, 61, 64) -- can only be accounted for as an attempt to seal off the self-contained deterministic universe inhabited by "la bête humaine". As John Coetzee points out, the introduction of an autonomous Raalt, "a villain-hero of pure evil", would violate the integrity of the essentially naturalistic view of man which La Guma offers.[4] Richard Chase's remark that "the protagonist of a naturalistic novel is ... at the mercy of circumstances rather than of himself, indeed he often seems to *have* no self"[5] corroborates the impression we gain that the characters in La Guma's novel are little more than stimulus-response mechanisms, programmed and set in motion by mysterious social forces: possessing themselves a very precarious sense of selfhood, they reveal to the reader still less of the individual identity which is of the essence (so our liberal tradition insists) of being human.

One of the ways in which La Guma signals the qualified humanity of his characters is through his description of their eyes, those physical organs traditionally regarded as the nearest manifestation of the condition of the soul. The eyes of those who inhabit the twilight world of District Six are uniformly opaque, inanimate and expressionless.

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[4] ibid., p.8.

[5] *The American Novel and its Tradition*, quoted in Lilian R. Furst and Peter N. Skrine, *Naturalism* (London: Methuen, 1971), p.18.

The proprietor of an illegal gambling den has eyes as "small and round and brown and flat and gritty as weathered sandstone" and as "hard and flat and shiny as the ends of cartridge shells" (pp.41,42). The eyes of the old look-out at the brothel are "as dull and damp as pieces of gravel in a gutter" (p.49), while the madame of the house has "small dark eyes like two discoloured patches in brown sandstone" (p.50). But the most chillingly inhuman metaphors are reserved for the eyes of Raalt: his are "hard, dispassionate eyes, hard and bright as pieces of blue glass" (p.11), "hard and expressionless as the end pieces of lead pipe" (p.58), "plate glass" (p.40) or "grey metal" (p.64). Elsewhere the policemen "[turn] the cold blue light of their eyes" upon the crowd (p.12), while Raalt's hard grey eyes swing "from face to face like the expressionless lenses of a camera" (p.57).

But it is chiefly La Guma's meticulous treatment of setting that locates his characters in the hierarchy of being. His descriptive technique works through the unremitting accumulation of detail: not the slightest trace of squalour or decay, no crack, stain or smell is allowed to pass unremarked. This ruthless revelation of the minutiae of poverty has been described by Vladimir Klima as an attempt by La Guma "to increase the trustworthiness of his tales" through a concentrated heightening of verisimilitude.[6] But the effect, especially in *A Walk in the Night* and *And a Three-fold Cord*, also has thematic and symbolic

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[6] *South African Prose Writing in English* (Prague: Oriental Institute in the Publishing House of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, 1971), p.143.

significance. For setting in slumland is more than the background against which the action unfolds as the characters' lives are lived out: it is a direct expression of the quality of those lives, a mirror held up to the "worn, brutalized, slum-scratched faces of the poor" (p.61). Moreover, La Guma makes it clear that the coarsened sensibilities and moral debasement of the poor are a direct consequence of the material environment in which they exist -- which in turn is the result of an exploitive economic system. The creation of setting in *A Walk in the Night* therefore has a vital function; and if no human heroes walk the dingy streets of District Six, such is the towering part it plays that the physical environment becomes the central figure in the drama: a dark pestilential presence enveloping all humankind in a miasma of spiritual ruin. In this world, humanity itself is absorbed into the filth and decrepitude of the ghetto. People become "the mould which accumulated on the fringes of the underworld" (p.3), and their status is rendered ambiguous:

> In the darkened doorway of a tenement between a fruit shop and a shoe store a couple made love, their faces glued together, straining at each other in an embrace among the piled dirt-tins and abandoned banana crates. (p.33)

In reciprocity the environment assumes bestial attributes:[7] a radio plays from "somewhere up in the damp intestines of the tenement" (p.33), while a tenement floor has "the appearance of a kind of loathsome skin disease" (p.21), the contagion of which no-one can escape.

The humanity of the ghetto-dwellers is also diminished by the apparent purposelessness of their existence, for it detracts from that which distinguishes them as people, that which differentiates them from

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[7] A favourite device, incidentally, of Emile Zola: c.f. the descriptions of Lantier's locomotive in *La Bête humaine*.

the unmeaning necrosis of the physical environment. As evening settles down, "There were people up and down, walking, ... or waiting aimlessly" (p.20). Everywhere people lounge mindlessly or wait without apparent purpose (pp.3,8); the slumdwellers "murmering idly in the fast-fading light like wasted ghosts in a plague-ridden city" (p.21) are hardly distinguishable from pieces of waste paper which move like "grey ghosts in the yellow electric light along the streets" (p.20). To the question asked by the police in their routine harassment of Adonis, "Where are you walking around, man?" (p.11), echoed by Joe "What are you walking about for, Mikey?" (p.65), there can be no answer, certainly no answer in the existential dimension which the question itself acquires. Like the other characters in the novel, Adonis is a ghost, a shadow of a man doomed like Hamlet's father "for a certain term to walk the night", to drift aimlessly with the currents of "the whirlpool world of poverty, petty crime and violence" (p.4).[8]

The focus which La Guma brings to bear on the low forms of life which thrive on dirt and live parasitically off the poor has the effect of a violent dislocation of perspective. In a world peopled with "wasted ghosts", the teeming, indestructible life of filth and animalculae is altogether more substantial and more purposeful:

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[8] Can Themba uses a strikingly similar image in his story "Crepuscule" to capture the experience of the black man "caught in the characterless world of belonging nowhere": "It is a crepuscular, shadow-life in which we wander as spectres seeking meaning for ourselves." *The Will to Die* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1972), p.8.

> On the floors of the tenements the grime collected quickly. A muddied sole of a shoe scuffed across the worn, splintery boards and left tiny embankments of dirt along the sides of the minute raised ridges of wood; or water was spilled or somebody urinated and left wet patches onto which the dust from the ceilings or the seams of clothes drifted and collected to leave dark patches as the moisture dried. A crumb fell or a drop of fat, and was ground underfoot, spread out to become a trap for the drifting dust that floated in invisible particles; the curve of a warped plank or the projections of a badly-made joint; the rosettes and bas-reliefs of Victorian plaster-work; the mortar that became damp and spongy when the rains came and then contracting and cracking with heat; all formed little traps for the dust. And in the dampness deadly life formed in decay and bacteria and mould, and in the heat and airlessness the rot appeared, too, so that things which once were whole or new withered or putrefied and the smells of their decay and putrifaction pervaded the tenements of the poor.
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> In the dark corners and the unseen crannies, in the fetid heat and slippery dampness the insects and vermin, maggots and slugs, 'roaches in shiny brown armour, spiders like tiny grey monsters carrying death under their minute feet or in the suckers, or rats with dusty black eyes with disease under the claws or in the fur, moved mysteriously. (pp. 34-35)

Similarly, the cockroach which enters Doughty's deserted room to gorge itself on spilled wine, blood and vomit (p.95), is rendered more vividly alive than ever the old man was. Oblivious of the tragedy which has befallen the human occupant of the room, it comes like an emissary from the realms of squalour to assert the fecundity of filth, and to claim the spoils of the inevitable victory over humanity.

La Guma does not often intrude to spell out the function of the setting he so carefully creates, but the following passage offers an explicit paradigm of the way in which the significance of setting is released:

> Willieboy climbed up the worn, sticky staircase... past the stark corridors with their dead-ends of latrines staring back like hopeless futures. (p.33).

La Guma generally prefers a more oblique technique akin to that of Hemingway's "objective epitome". On one occasion, strongly reminicent of the scene towards the end of *A Farewell to Arms* ("There isn't anything, dog"), Michael Adonis watches a cat raiding a dustbin:

> A cat, the colour of dishwater, was trying to paw the remains of a fishhead from one of the bins.
>
> Michael Adonis paused in the entrance of the way to the stairs and watched the cat. It tugged and wrestled with the head which was weighed down by a pile of rubbish, a broken bottle and an old boot. He watched it and then reaching out with a foot upset the pile of rubbish onto the floor, freeing the fish-head. The cat pulled it from the bin and it came away with a tangle of entrails. The cat began to drag it towards the doorway leaving a damp trail across the floor.
>
> 'Playing with cats?'
>
> Michael Adonis looked around and up at the girl who had come down the stairs and was standing at the bend in the staircase.
>
> 'I'd rather play with you', he said, grinning at her. (p.21-22)

The image of "snot-nosed boys in ragged shirts and horny feet" scrambling for a cigarette butt (p.8); the description of the tatterdemalion beach-comber Joe, his clothes held together with pins and pieces of string (p.9), and a welter of other grimy details have already suggested that the people of District Six fashion their lives, like ghostly scavangers on the refuse heap of life, from the leftovers of others.[9] And now Michael Adonis, desperately trying to salvage some self-respect after the humiliating events of the day, encounters the girl Hazel, who has a mouth "stark as a wound in her dark face" and wears new yellow shoes "that gave the

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[9] c.f. the Coloured Boesman's statement, "We are white man's rubbish", in Athol Fugard's play *Boesman and Lena*.

impression of something expensive abandoned on a junkheap" (p.22). But the sad irony is that there is no-one to push over the dust-bin of life for Michael Adonis: the girl evades his grasp, frustrating his desire and leaving him with "a feeling of abandonment", nursing "a foetus of hatred inside his belly" (p.23).

La Guma's vision of poverty is unwavering, its intensity is stifling. We can sympathize with the young policeman when he feels "trapped [in a tenament] by the smell of decay and disintegration" (p.60). The reader is almost suffocated by the "vast, anonymous odour, so widespread and all-embracing as to become unidentifiable" which envelopes the "teeming, cramped world of poverty" (p.48). Yet La Guma cannot be accused of over-writing because his effects, although sensational, are never gratuitous. The coherence of his vision is guaranteed by an artistic principle which insists that character and setting are inseparable. But there is more than aesthetic integrity at issue here, because this principle is more than a device of characterization. It is La Guma's achievement that his work of art is also a consummate incarnation of his ideology.

Marxian assumptions about the nature of man are not greatly dissimilar from those of the Naturalists, except that in the Marxist view the forces which shape man's nature are in the final reality determined by the "material conditions" of his life, "the mode of production of the material means of existence".[10] The lack of individuality and the limited humanity of La Guma's characters are in this light an expression of the dehumanizing

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[10] The phraze used by Marx in his Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*.

effects of a system which reduces its victims to expendable units of labour. Yet the materialistic determinism of Marxism is not 'pessimistic' in the Naturalistic sense, for there is a remedy to the evils of poverty and its desperate concomitants, and that remedy lies in the overthrow of of the capitalist mode of production. Thus although La Guma presents his characters struggling in a web of circumstance, he does hint at the possibility of escape through the radical re-organisation of the socio-political system. To understand La Guma's analysis of the South African system in *A Walk in the Night* it must be remembered that the Marxist interpretation of South African history argues that increasing racial and political oppression has come about as a result of, and not in spite of, the imperatives of capitalist economic growth. Racism is a particularly conspicuous symptom of a more deep-seated disease of the socio-economic structure. La Guma's radical critique of the South African system -- more particularly of Coloured society -- is concentrated in the portrayal of five characters: Michael Adonis, Willieboy, Greene, Joe and Frank Lorenzo.

The pointless crime and moral degeneration of Michael Adonis are unequivocally depicted as consequent on his unfair dismissal from the factory. Adonis considers himself a victim of racial discrimination, but La Guma's analysis goes deeper. Adonis's anger is partly triggered by the insult of being called "a cheeky black bastard" by the white foreman. "Me, I'm not black" he declares to Willieboy (p.4), for to the Coloured South African, skin-colour -- as a measure of class -- is a fiercely coveted asset as well as a handicap. In retaliation he calls the foreman "a no-good pore-white", an insult which couples culture with income-bracket to express a class-category at odds with the conventional colour-class hierarchy.

But Adonis is unaware of the implications of the exchange, implications which are amplified in his ill-fated encounter with the old Irishman Doughty. "You old white bastard, you got nothing to worry about" he sneers, to which Doughty replies, "What's my white got to do with it? Here I am in shit street..." (p.27). It is one of La Guma's criticisms of Coloured society that Adonis is unable to accept that, as the old man suggests, they are equally g sts, "doomed for a certain term to walk the night", to grope in existential darkness. La Guma has remarked elsewhere that "racism is an extension of the myth that rationalizes the position of the master, his power and wealth, at the expense of the servant who passes his life in toil to produce that wealth."[11] The servant-victims of the system, whether brown or white, are alike "destroyed by ... something neither Doughty nor Michael Adonis understood" (p.25); Adonis's understanding is obfuscated by colour-consciousness and self-pity. The causal links between Mikey's experience at work, his hatred of whites, and the death of Doughty, are made plain: "You old bastard ... can't a boy have a bloody piss without getting kicked in the backside by a lot of effing law?" (p.28) he cries, before lunging at the old man with the half-empty wine-bottle. And Doughty, like Willieboy later in the novel, becomes another sacrifice to the blind forces of hatred and prejudice that blast "the life which specialized in finding scapegoats for anything that steered it from its dreary course" (p.48).

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[11] Alex La Guma, "The Condition of Culture in South Africa," *Présence Africaine* 80 (1971), 114.

The moral ruin of Michael Adonis is consummated by the complete inversion of values produced by his crime. He looks upon it as an achievement, "newly acquired status". He feels "suddenly pleased and proud of his own predicament" for "the rights and wrongs of the matter did not occur to him then" (p.66) -- nor ever will, it appears, as he feels "a stir of pleasure" at being approached by Foxy and his thugs to be initiated into gangland.

Willieboy has built his very identity around this inversion of values. He wears "an air of nonchalance, like the outward visible sign of his distorted pride in the terms he served in a reformatory and once in a prison for assault" (p.3). Willieboy is a 'skollie', a small-time crook, a punk, who affects a slouch, sports gaudy shirts, peg-bottomed trousers, an ostentatious crucifix, and brushes his hair into "a flamboyant peak". All these affectations manifest a desperate attempt to rise above the dreary anonymity of his existence. His heroes are "the flashy desperadoes who quivered across the screen" at the local bug-house, but they only induce in him a sharper sense of his own inferiority: "always aware of his inadequacy, moving unnoticed in the mob", he remains as "inconspicuous as a smudge on a grimy wall", relying on alcohol and dagga to maintain his facade of bravado (p.72).

Willieboy responds to the degenerate system by choosing not to work: "'Me,I never work for no white john. Not even brown one. To hell with work. Work, work, work. Where does it get you?'" (p.4). Willieboy is wrong in the universal but right in the immediate context, for labour in the capitalist system is devoid of meaning and purpose. But his next remark to Michael Adonis is bitterly ironic in the light of subsequent events: "Whether you work or don't, you live anyway, somehow" (p.4). For Willieboy's death is inevitably consequent on his lifestyle and the relentless causality of environment and circumstances which have made him what he is.

Although quite innocent of Doughty's murder, "Years of treacherous experience and victimization through suspicion" (p.48) induce him to take flight after discovering the body; and it is a similar impulse which makes him turn and run when he is challenged by the police. Hiding on a rooftop from Raalt, Willieboy reflects "'What did I do? I never did nothing'" (p.83), and remembers the continual undeserved beatings he received from his mother, who in turn was "wreaking vengeance on him for the beatings she received from his father" (p.84). Nothing has changed for Willieboy; having cruelly assaulted the nondescript Greene, he is about to be gunned down by the police. In the blind alley of poverty, cut off from the main thoroughfare of humanity, "they's always kicking a poor bastard around" (p.93). La Guma's narrative skills are shown to advantage in his sensitive handling of Willieboy's death, which is unexpectedly and profoundly moving.

Another of the "mass of nonentities" to which Willieboy belongs is Greene, "a man with a haggard, wine-soaked, ravaged face", whom we first meet getting drunk in a seedy bar "where cowards absorbed dutch courage out of small glasses and leaned against the shiny, scratched and polished mahogany counter for support against the crushing burdens of insignificant lives" (p.13). Greene refuses to listen when the taxi-driver tries to convey the gist of a speech he has heard at a political meeting.

> 'I can't explain it right, you know, hey,' the taxi-driver answered, frowning. 'But I heard some johns on the Parade talking about it. Said colour bar was because of the system.'
> 'Shit.'
> 'Cut out politics,' Greene said again. 'Those bastards all come from Russia.' He hic-coughed again, spraying saliva from his slack mouth.
> 'What's wrong with Russia?' the taxi-driver asked. 'What do you know about Russia?'
> 'Have a drink and cut out politics,' Greene said. (p.17).

Greene then refuses to recognise the connection which the taxi-driver inarticulately perceives between the institutionalized violence of a lynching in the Southern States and a stabbing in District Six. (p.19).

La Guma uses Greene to criticise the lack of political awareness amongst Coloured people, particularly as it is manifested in Greene's case, as wilful ignorance based on prejudice. Even when he is beaten up by Willieboy later that night, there is no suggestion that Greene has the slightest inkling of a possible link between his own personal fate and the abstract political forces he had heard discussed earlier.

La Guma comes closest to a symbolic portrayal of character in the figure of Joe, the homeless beachcomber "with a strange passion for things that came from the sea" (p.9). David Rabkin believes Joe to be

> ... a type of the Strandloper, the Khoikhoi people who fished and gathered food on the coastal fringe of the Cape, at the time of the first white settlers. As a representative of the earliest forebears of the Cape Coloured people, he speaks with the voice of the tribe: 'I'm your pal. A man's got a right to look after another man. Jesus, isn't we all people?' This instinctive force, which allows him to claim a right, is shown to be related, in a semi-mystical fashion, to his traditional closeness to the sea.[12]

On another level, Joe's response to the system has been to opt out of it. The very rags and tatters which clothe him are a measure of his non-participation in the market economy. When his family is evicted from their home in the city, he feels that to have followed them to the re-settlement area would have been "like running away":

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[12] "Alex La Guma and Reality in South Africa," p.56.

> 'Some bastards come with a piece of paper and tell you to get the hell out because you haven't got money for the rent, and a shopkeeper tell you you got to have money else you don't get nothing to eat, and you got to go away somewhere else where its going to start all over again....' (p.70)

Because Joe has refused to be absorbed into the vicious cycle of coercion and degradation, he does not suffer from its moral deformaties, and almost alone of the characters in the novel, has preserved his spiritual innocence and moral integrity.

But Joe's way of life is threatened, symbolically, by the imminent closure of the beaches to non-whites; and the passage at the end of the novel in which Joe is almost mystically transfigured is seen by John Coetzee as an indication that he is "drifting towards suicide":[13]

> Somewhere the young man, Joe, made his way towards the sea, walking alone through the starlit darkness. In the morning he would be close to the smell of the ocean and wade through the chill, comforting water, bending close to the purling green surface and see the dark undulating fronds of seaweed, writhing and swaying in the shallows, like beckoning hands. And in the rock pools he would examine the mysterious life of the sea things, the transparent beauty of starfish and anemone, and hear the relentless, consistent pounding of the creaming waves against the granite citadels of rock. (p.96)

If this is so, then we may well be entitled to construe Joe's death as the end of the last traces of independence from the market economy.

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[13] "Alex La Guma and the Responsibilities of the South African Writer," p.9.

If *A Walk in the Night* can boast no hero, it at least contains a character with the potential for heriosm. Franky Lorenzo is a labourer, a man with "an air of harassment about him, of too hard work and unpaid bills and sour babies" (p.35). Yet his eyes are "soft and dark and young"; his wife Grace has "the grandeur of an ascetic saint" (p.36), and their love for each other is untainted by the miserable squalour in which they are forced to live. Franky Lorenzo's moment of truth arrives when Raalt is questioning the man who claims to have seen Doughty's killer. Interrupting the proceedings, Lorenzo warns Abrahams "You've said enough already, Johnny" (p.62). Along with the rest of the Coloured poor in the novel, Franky Lorenzo regards "the Law" as an instrument of oppression rather than protection, but unlike the others he refuses to be intimidated. He speaks on behalf of his people out of a sense of corporate solidarity and his voice, lonely, proud, sounds the only note of real resistence in the entire novel.

> Still he met the constable's eyes holding them with his own, until he felt his wife tugging at his arm, pleading: 'Franky, don't get into trouble, please. Remember ... remember ...'
> 'All right,' Franky Lorenzo said sullenly. 'All right.' He looked across at Abrahams for a moment and then looked away again. (pp.62-63)

Lorenzo backs down not because he is frightened, but because he owes his first loyalty to his family and to the unborn child of which his wife seems to be reminding him. The child quickening in the womb of Grace Lorenzo becomes a symbol of hope and the novel ends on a note of muted promise:

> 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.

Meanwhile Abrahams spends a sleepless night wondering "'What's it help you, turning on your own people?'" (p.95); and we are reminded of "the little knot of rage", the "foetus of hatred" that Michael Adonis nurses within him. The positive affirmation of the Lorenzo family measures the inadequacy of Adonis's indulgent, unproductive response to his predicament.// *A Walk in the Night* is in some ways the most carefully programmed of La Guma's novels, but it is also the least doctrinaire. At his first attempt, La Guma has succeeded admirably in disguising a didactic plot as a mimetic one. He presents the reader with a *fait accompli* -- an analysis of South African society along orthodox Marxist lines -- while at the same time sustaining the illusion that the plot is self-contained and self-generating. Faced with the challenge of indicting an abstract, invisible enemy, La Guma has never allowed his vision of the concrete to be compromised by the demands of the intangible; nor has he allowed his personal feelings to undermine the impartiality of his analytical framework. His careful portrayal of the white policemen as co-patients alongside of the more obvious victims of the system reveals the extent of his loyalty to materialist dogma.[14] *A Walk in the Night* ends on a note of hope and anticipation, with Grace Lorenzo "restlessly waiting for the dawn". La Guma's next novel, *And a Threefold Cord*, begins in the darkest hour just before that dawn, but is illumined at its close by the first light of the new day.

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[14] In subsequent works, La Guma steadily loses patience with the impartiality of historical necessity and in his most recent novel, *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, he presents the whites simply as an evil to be obliterated.

CHAPTER FOUR

The plot of *And a Threefold Cord*[1] is slight and may be summarily outlined. The Pauls family - Dad and Ma Pauls, their sons Charlie, Ronald and Jorny - live in a miserable three-roomed "pondokkie" somewhere on the Cape Flats. As the narrative begins, the onset of rough weather is posing an additional threat to the already precarious security of their lives.

Charlie Pauls, faced with the "serious proposition" of a leaking roof, decides to go and cadge a piece of scrap iron from George Mostert, the proprietor of a nearby service station. On the way he has a fight with Roman, a vicious thug who is jealous of Ronald's liason with a tart named Susie Meyer. When Charlie returns he shares some wine and conversation with Uncle Ben, during which his growing political consciousness is revealed. Then follows a series of calamities. First, Charlie's ailing father dies; then one night the shanty town suffers the brutal invasion of a police raid. Amongst those arrested is Ronald Pauls, who has stabbed Suzie Meyer to death in a fit of jealous rage. Finally, the children of Freda, the woman Charlie

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[1] *And a Threefold Cord* (Berlin: Seven Seas Books, 1964). It is regrettable that this, La Guma's best novel, is out of print at the time of writing.

has decided to marry. are incinerated in a horrible accident.

Rain is still falling as the shattered remnants of the Pauls family gather in the shanty. But Charlie has learnt from experience that "people can't stand up to the world alone", and the novel ends on a note of hope that human solidarity -- the "threefold cord" of the epigraph and title -- may yet prevail.[2]

La Guma's second novel takes the reader a little further down the road to revolution. Although the material environment looms as large, if not larger, in the determination of human destiny, there is one character whose political awareness signals our arrival in what Engels claimed to be the proper domain of literary realism, the depiction of

> ...the revolutionary response of the members of the working class to the oppression that surrounds them, their convulsive attempts -- semiconscious or conscious -- to attain their rights as human beings...[3]

Although Charlie Paul's only "revolutionary" action is to punch a policeman and then run for his life, the dawning class consciousness which he is anxious to share not only helps him to face the succession of tragedies which have befallen the Pauls family with composure and understanding, but also points towards a future full of hope. "People can't stand up to the

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[2] "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour./ For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up./ Again, if two lie together, then they have heat, but how can one be warm alone?/ And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken." *Ecclesiastes 4* : 9-12.

[3] Letter to Margaret Harkness, April 1888, in *Literature and Art by Karl Marx and Frederich Engels :Selections from their Writings*. (New York: International Publishers, 1947), p.42.

world alone", he says, "they got to be together" (p.168): and it is precisely this standing up to the world, the most humble human victory of all, which is celebrated in this powerful novel.

The change of setting from urban ghetto to the bleak wasteland of the Cape Flats acquires a referential resonance in view of the South African government's Group Areas resettlement programme. Although at the time of writing the forced removal of Coloured families from District Six has (temporarily?) been halted, the topicality of La Guma's protest in *And a Threefold Cord* is undiminished after thirteen years. Shanty towns continue to proliferate all over South Africa, and the calculated insensitivity of recent government attempts to 'deal with' the squatter problem evidences precisely the mentality of George Mostert's prosperous petrol customer, the bloated "connoisseur of poverty" (p.163) who declares:

> "Wonder why the authorities don't clear the bloody lot out. Just brings disease and things... If I had any say, I'd pull down the whole bally lot and clear 'em all out.... I don't know what we poor buggers pay taxes for." (p.162).

The shanty-dwellers in *And a Threefold Cord* have more than a corrosive man-made environment to contend with. Lacking the means to adequately defend themselves against the onslaught of bad weather, they encounter Nature itself as a hostile force, an enemy as malevolent and inscrutable as the police convoy that comes in the darkness and wet to devastate their lives. Indeed, rain and wind preside over the police raid like willing henchmen, exacerbating the misery of those who have been turned out of their homes and arrested. But when the police depart, their confederates in oppression remain, growling "like a hungry monster", attacking the squatters "with ferocity" (p.79), "in an anger of frustration" (p.166).

Rain, anthropomorphized as "a cutting, muttering, gurgling, sucking, bubbling personality, like a homocidal imbecile with a knife" (p.126), dominates the narrative from beginning to end.

In the opening chapter, men and bad weather square up for a violent collision as the elements of the Cape winter are ominously deployed (pp.17-18). What is to the more fortunate merely a change in the weather signifies to the shabby-dwellers the onset of a grim struggle for survival, simply because their survival depends on the ability of their shacks to withstand the assault of wind and rain. Once again, La Guma insists that people are what their physical environment makes them. The characters in *And a Threefold Cord* are people whose expectations are limited to the desperate hope that their homes will not collapse on top of them. They are literally "the people of the shanties and the *pondokkie* cabins" (p.18), because their dwelling-places both reflect and define their humanity. La Guma develops this premise into an unforced, suggestive symbolism in which the shanty and the forces that beleaguer it become material correlatives for its inhabitants (more specifically, the family unit) and the tribulations which beset them.

The Pauls' house is an impossible conglomeration of junk and litter:

> Dad and Charlie had scavenged, begged and, on dark nights stolen the materials for the house. They had dragged for miles sheets of rusty corrugated iron, planks, pieces of cardboard, and all the astonishing miscellany that had gone into building the house. There were flattened fuel cans advertising a brand of oil on its sides, tins of rusty nails which Charlie had pulled from the gathering flotsam and jetsam and straightened with a hammer on a stone; rags for stuffing cracks and holes, strips of baling wire and waterproof paper, cartons, old pieces of metal and strands of wire, sides of packing-cases, and a pair of railway sleepers. (pp. 39-40).

The shanty's sheer existence is a tribute to what one critic calls "the power of putting together, of assemblage".[4] Its otherwise useless components find usefulness in combination with each other; together they realize the "wealth [that exists] even in dirt" (p.152). A broken-down kitchen stove found "abandoned on a rubble heap" (p.40) is given new life as the centre of the Pauls' corporate home life -- both literally and symbolically. For La Guma implies that it is equally only in community and comradeship that people may survive as people and attain the full stature and value of their humanity.

The Pauls' shanty, which has "the precarious, delicately balanced appearance of a house of cards" (p.41) reflects the dire insecurity of the Pauls family at the outset of the novel. Dad Pauls is bed-ridden and moribund, Ronald surly and unco-operative; Charlie, the other breadwinner, is out of work; and Caroline, nine months pregnant, is faced with the prospect of giving birth in an old packing crate. Inevitably, it seems, the house of cards must collapse. Dad Pauls dies, Ronald murders Susie Meyer and appears destined for the gallows, the police raid the shanty town, and Freda's children perish in a grotesque accident.

Yet the ramshackle shanty proves to be more than a match for the violence of the elements:

> Miraculously, the house held. Dad and Charlie Pauls and others had built it well; well enough to stand up to this kind of storm, anyway. The rain lashed at it, as if in an anger of frustration... But the house seemed to clench its teeth and cling defiantly to life. (p.166).

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[4] David Rabkin, "Alex La Guma and Reality in South Africa," p.57.

It was Charlie Pauls who fixed the leak in the shack's roof and it is Charlie who now holds the family together in their hour of dispair. Groping for the words to express the imperfect understanding of their predicament nascent in his new-found class consciousness, he remembers again the man he once worked with "laying pipe" in Calvinia, whose ideas are having an increasing influence on his own thinking. He takes Freda's hand -- "It wasn't cold, as he expected it to be, but rough and warm with life" (p.168) -- and for the second time quotes the "slim burg", only this time speaking with real personal conviction:

> 'Like he say, people can't stand up to the world alone, they got to be together. I reckon maybe he was right. A *slim juba*. Maybe it was like that with Ronny-boy. Ronald didn't ever want nobody to he'p him. Wanted to do things alone. Never was a part of us. I don't know. Maybe, like Uncle Ben, too. Is not natural for people to be alone. Hell, I reckon people was just *made* to be together. I --' Words failed him again, and he shook his head, frowning. (p.168)

Then Charlie the homemaker, the repairer of roofs, feeling the "awkwardness of the time he had decided to marry [Freda] " (p.168) -- overwhelmed by the same transcendant emotion his more general commitment to others engenders -- sets about the simple domestic chore of making a pot of coffee. The resilience and tenacity of the communal life is assured; and the promise of the lone carnation on the rubbish dump, "gleaming, wonderfully bright, red as blood and life, like hope blooming in an anguished breast" (p.154), is almost fulfilled, as Charlie glimpses a bird soaring skyward, bearing with it the aspirations of the invincible human spirit:

> Charlie Pauls stood there and looked out into the driving rain. The rain bored into the earth. The light outside was grey, and the rain fell steadily, like heart-beats. As he looked out at the rain, he saw to his surprise, a bird dart suddenly from among the patchwork roofs of the shanties and head straight, straight into the sky. (p.169)

Yet viewed out of context, the point of Charlie's appeal may appear to be a rather negative one. Certainly, remarks such as "people most of the time takes trouble hardest when they alone" (p.168) bespeak little more than a homiletic gesture towards familiar platitudes in the vein of "misery loves company": in which case the "threefold cord" promised in the title of the novel is merely the consolation of commiseration. And indeed Bernth Lindfors takes La Guma to task for what appears to be a "deflection" of his "message" in the last chapter, a message moreover which "seems to be thrust on his novel instead of springing from it."[5]

However, a careful reading of the novel reveals that these allegations are ill-founded. As far as the first is concerned, Lindfors appears to forget that it is not La Guma but a fictional character who utters the offending sentiments; furthermore, a simple, inarticulate character who is at the time under severe emotional stress. More importantly, Charlie's pronouncements must be considered in the context of the novel as a whole, and particularly in conjunction with his conversation with Uncle Ben (pp. 80-84), for their full resonance to be tapped.

Lindfors' second criticism is a more serious one, and one that strikes at the heart of the fundamental artistic dilema which confronts

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[5] "Form and technique in the novels of Richard Rive and Alex La Guma" *Journal of the New African Literature and the Arts*, 2 (Fall 1966), 15. It is possible that I misinterpret the thrust of Lindfors' criticism. I take his objection to be that the narrative cannot sustain the weight of political statement it is made to bear, whereas he may be criticising the lack of subtlety with which La Guma makes that statement. Another possibility is that the critic had not discriminated in his own mind between these two arguments.
Finally, it is worth noting that Lindfors voices similar reservations about *A Walk in the Night*: "the moral does not grow out of the story naturally. Rather, it hangs like a dead appendage, a label which La Guma tacked onto the story in order to draw attention to the lesson he wants readers to learn". It is hoped that the foregoing discussion of this novel may serve as a corrective to this view.

the protest writer. Which exigency is to take precedence, the ideological or the artistic, the didactic or the aesthetic? Would La Guma's novel have been more 'successful' had he not opted to conform to a narrowly tendentious programme; had he, perhaps, been content to leave the Pauls family, annihilated by huge social forces, in a condition of hopeless moral and spiritual bankruptcy? Certainly, given some of the premises of his presented world, such an ending might have embodied a greater measure of truth-to-life, of the verisimilitude which is in the last resort the only universal criterion by which realistic art-forms may be judged.

But to the socialist realist, the writer whom Stalin characterized as "the engineer of the human soul", to depict life truthfully in works of art means

> ...to depict it not scholastically, not lifelessly, not simply as "objective reality", but to depict actuality in its revolutionary development.[6]

Socialist realism involves the portrayal of the *typical*, "that which expresses most fully and precisely the nature of existing social forces",[7] not necessarily that which is most widespread, usual or likely. In fact, "conscious exaggeration or stressed images do not exclude the typical but reveal or emphasize it more fully".[8]

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[6] A.A. Zhdanov at the First All-Soviet Congress of Writers, August 17, 1934. Quoted in George J. Becker, *Documents of Modern Literary Realism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p.487.

[7] G. Malenkov at the Nineteenth Party Congress, October 5th 1952, quoted in Becker, p.488.

[8] ibid.

Such a proposition is altogether alien to the tradition of critical or bourgeois realism; and if it no longer makes sense to object to a tendentious distortion of *vraisemblance*, the Western literary critic might be justified in accusing socialist realism of misusing the term "realism". He might even be tempted to question the validity of its works as imaginative literature. Philip Rahv observes that "Imaginative writing cannot include fixed and systematic definitions of reality without violating its own existential character".[9] In fact, as Gorky insisted, 'socialist realism' is a misnomer for "revolutionary romanticism", a mode of representation whose primary purpose is not mimesis but "to promote the consolidation of revolutionary achievement in the present and a clearer view of the lofty objectives of the socialist future".[10]

Although *And a Threefold Cord* could with some justification be claimed by the school of socialist realism as one of its own, the novel can be shown to bear up to the scrutiny of the bourgeois aesthetic which informs Lindfors' allegation of didactic artificiality. For

> ...in any imaginative effort, that which we mean by the real remains the basic criterion of viability, the crucial test of relevance, even if its specific features can hardly be determined in advance but must be *felt anew* in each given instance.[11]

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[9] "Notes on the Decline of Naturalism," in Becker, p.581.

[10] Maxim Gorky, *Gorki o literature* (Moscow, 1957), quoted in Becker, p.487.

[11] Rahv (op. cit.), p.581.

And a Threefold Cord projects its own criteria of relevance and viability which safely account for its political statement at the level of *vraisemblance*.

In order to effectively answer Lindfors' charges, it is necessary to show, first, that Charlie Pauls' passionate call for unity is consistent with the expectations the reader has thus far evolved of him, in other words, that the utterance rings true; and secondly, that the character of Charlie itself is consistent with the remainder of the fictional world, and not merely an incongruous mouthpiece for the author's social injunctions. We may safely assume that La Guma has in general created a thoroughly convincing fictional milieu.

One of the characters who "wanted to do things alone" (p.168) is Uncle Ben, an old soak who wears "an expression of resignation to some inexplicable woe" (p.76). Ben is darkly aware of the presence of some unidentifiable "evil" at the back of his drinking problem:[12]

> 'I don't know what it is, Charlie, man. A man got to have his *dring*, don't I say? But with me is like as if something force me to drink, drink, drink. Is like an evil, Charlie, forcing a man to go on swallowing till he's fall-fall with liquor. An evil, man.' (p.81)

He is able to discern a connection between his own fate and that of Dad Pauls:

> 'Is an evil, Charlie, what make a man drink himself to death with wine, an evil what make a poor old man shiver and shake himself to death in a leaking *pondok* without no warm soup and no medicine.' (p.81)

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[12] c.f. *A Walk in the Night*, p.25. Doughty is "destroyed by alchohol and something neither he nor Michael Adonis understood".

But lacking even the most rudimentary political education, Ben can connect no further, and lapses into lugubrious reverie. La Guma takes the opportunity to insert a graphic objective epitome which provides the perfect counterpoint to Ben's remarks. A fly "trapped by winter" makes a bid for the dim light of a window pane but is brought up short by the glass; instead it commences drinking from a puddle of spiltwine (p.82). Later it overturns and begins to drown in the wine, "its wings trapped". Finally,

> ...the fly fell onto the floor and lay in the darkness, struggling. In the sick-room Dad Pauls cough-cough-coughed and then wheezed like a broken bellows. (p.84).

Meanwhile Ben's maudlin reflections have set Charlie thinking and prompted a recollection:

> 'There was a burg working with us on the pipe. When we was laying pipe up by Calvinia. Know what he say? Always reading newspapers and things. He said to us, the poor don't have to be poor.' He took the second bottle and equalised the drinks in the two pickle jars. 'This burg say, if the poor people all got together and took everything in the whole blerry world, there wouldn't be poor no more. Funny kind of talk, but it sounded awright,' Charlie said.
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> He continued, warming up: 'Further, this rooker say if all the stuff in the world was shared out among everybody, all would have enough to live nice. He reckoned people got to stick together to get this stuff.'
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> Uncle Ben said, frowning: 'Sound almost like a sin, that. Bible say you mustn't covet other people's things.'
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> '...' Charlie said. 'This rooker did know what he was talking, I reckon.'
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> 'I heard people talking like that,' Uncle Ben said. 'That's communis' things. Talking against the govvernment.'
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> 'Listen,' Charlie said, as they had another drink. He was feeling voluble. 'Listen, Uncle Ben, one time I went up to see Freda up by the people she work for, cleaning and washing. Hell, that people got a house *mos*, big as the effing city hall, almost, and there's an old bitch with purple hair and fat backsides and her husband eating off a table a mile long, with fancy candles and *dingus* on it. And a *juba* like me can't even

> touch the handle of the front door. You got to go round the back. Eating off nice shiny tables, plenty of roast meat and stuff.' Charlie scowled and swallowed some wine. 'Bible say love your neighbour, too. Heard that when I was a lighty in Sunday-school.' (p.83)

It is most important to notice that Charlie's awareness of inequality and his crude conceptions of class are not second-hand: although influenced by the politically informed labourer, they do not derive solely from him. On the contrary, they arise spontaneously and logically from Charlie's personal observation of enormous discrepancies in standards of living, an observation which has raised certain political questions to which Charlie demands political answers. Uncle Ben, who stubbornly refuses to face the political implications of his intuitive perception of "evil" ("'Thats communis' things. Talking against the government'"), adopts an orthodox religious stance. His attitude implies that such matters are in the hands of God ("'We got to trust in the Lord, Charlie'" p.82) and he advocates religion as a source of solace (p.82). Charlie, frankly sceptical about the efficacy of faith: "'Ma read the Bible every night. It don't make the poor old toppy any better'" (p.82), now contemplates its manifest hypocrisy with scorn: "'Bible say love your neighbour, too. Heard that... in Sunday School.'"

Thus, to briefly recap on the extent of his political education, Charlie understands that his poverty is the result of a system which distributes wealth unequally, and therefore unfairly. By rejecting the idea that the system is divinely ordained ("'Who works out how much weight each person got to carry?'" p.89), he has accepted the possibility that it might be changed. Furthermore, he has an inkling that this change might only be achieved through the concerted efforts of the poor or working class.

Yet at the end of the novel, invoking the same authority of the man he met "laying pipe", he seems to be saying that people have to stick together in order to survive. Charlie Pauls is in fact expressing two ideas that he has not yet sorted out in his own mind. On the one hand, he is voicing his as yet half-conscious realization that the solidarity necessary for the poor to stand up for their rights must somehow start with the family; and on the other, he is wrestling with the more profound notion that the individual may find fulfilment only in community.[13]

Lenin believed that one facet of the revolutionary consciousness, the total identification of the interests of the individual with those of the group, would evolve naturally from "... the observance of elementary rules of living together -- rules known for centuries and repeated for thousands of years in all codes of behaviour".[14] In *And a Threefold Cord*, La Guma dramatizes the hope that the instinctive loyalties among family and friends may in the course of time extend to the larger family of class, and thence to all mankind. He assures us of the existence of such charitable bonds and warns us by example of the consequences of ignoring or perverting them.

Charlie Pauls defends his family's honour in the fight with Roman on an unsolicited impulse of fraternal loyalty: "'A man must *mos* fight for his brother, don't I say?'" (p.58), he proudly announces to Freda.

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[13] Charlie Pauls has also an inchoate, precarious understanding of historical necessity. When Freda is consumed with remorse for having accidentally caused her children's death, Charlie suggests: "Hell, man, maybe we is both to blame. Maybe it was all just put out like that, the way some people say. Maybe is God. Uncle Ben and *ou* Brother Bombata talk like that" (pp. 167-8). Charlie has already rejected the idea of a supernatural agency and the determinism he gropingly perceives is materialistic; the insight into necessity it affords him is the only freedom within his reach.

[14] Quoted by E.H. Carr in his introduction to N. Bukharin and E. Preobrazhensky, *The ABC of Communism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p.17.

And Missus Nzuba, enormous, endearing earth-mother, gives spontaneously and selflessly: "'We got to yelp each other'" (p.110) she says, explaining with simple logic, "'I'm proud to yelp you. We been living here together a long time...we all got to stand by each other'" (p.112). During the police raid, which profanes the sanctity of the marriage bed with the demand that a man produce his "permit to love" his wife (p.132), the correspondence between family and class loyalty is suggested at a verbal level. One of the victims sadly enquires of a black policeman, "'Why do you do this, brother? Why do you do this to your own people?'" (p.133).

Central to the socialist ethic is the belief that the individual can achieve fulfilment only through society, not against it, so that the ideal of fellow-feeling is not only a potential political weapon but also a pre-condition of self-realization and true humanity. The poor, who lack the means to buy themselves the specious impedimenta that serve as a measure of human dignity in capitalistic society, have only the wealth of human relationships to fall back upon. Thus Ma Pauls speaks with more wisdom than she perhaps realises when, in reply to Uncle Ben's remark that "A family always give trouble", she says: "Yes. But I reckon is better to have some troubles than nothing at all" (p.91).

Those who selfishly ignore the call of community pay the price of having "nothing at all". Severed from the humanizing influence of his family, Ronald Pauls is reduced by a combination of social forces and his own rampant id to a subhuman monster;[15] Uncle Ben is a useless drunk; while Roman, who shamefully abuses the authority vested in him as head of a family, is a bestial automaton. Significantly, it is Roman, Ronald, Susie and that

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[15] Even Ronald is incorporated into the family/shanty symbolism mentioned earlier. As the force which threatens the solidarity of the family, he is metamorphosed into the force which threatens the solidity of the shanty. When Ronald does his butcher's work on Susie Meyer under the driving rain, he becomes that "cutting, muttering, gurgling, sucking, bubbling personality," "the homicidal imbecile with a knife", which is La Guma's metaphor for the rain.

other loner, George Mostert, who are most frequently described in terms of animal imagery (e.g. pp.48,66,128,129,145).

And so La Guma's "message", as it finds expression in Charlie's impassioned exhortation at the end of the novel, far from being arbitrarily "thrust" upon it, evolves organically and convincingly from the narrative. But the story of the Pauls family does not exhaust the social analysis contained in *And a Threefold Cord*.

George Mostert, the white proprietor of a derelict service station, has lived for too long without the joys of human comradeship. His loneliness indicates another force that threatens the harmony of the social family -- the prejudice of race. Although he is loth to countenance the fact, Mostert's declining fortunes place him in practically the same economic and hence social bracket as the inhabitants of the shanty town a stone's throw away. But to Mostert the settlement is "a strange country" peopled by "a foreign people met only through ragged brown ambassadors who stopped by sometimes to beg for some useful rubbish..." (p.67). Although in his solitude Mostert is grateful for any company, he is

> ...trapped in his glass office by his own loneliness and a wretched pride in a false racial superiority, the cracked embattlements of his world, and he peered out sadly past the petrol pumps which gazed like petrified sentries across the concrete no-man's land of the road. (p.67)

Even after he has accepted Charlie Pauls' invitation, so engrained are the patterns of racial privilege that, while he pours himself a stiff drink, "It did not occur to him to offer Charlie a shot, too" (p.72). And so Mostert fights a losing battle with his "warped sense of loftiness" which tells him "it ain't right people like us should mix with them" (p.125).

Mostert's attitude towards his Coloured neighbours stands in stark contrast to that of the African, Missus Nzuba; and La Guma implies that the disease of racism will preclude the white worker from his rightful participation in the revolution. This suggestion is reinforced by the images of dilapidation and conflict which characterize the descriptions of Mostert and his garage, images which look both backwards and forwards in history:

> Like a lone blockhouse on a frontier, [the garage] stood against the darkgreen background of trees, with an air of neglect surrounding it, as if deserted by its garrison and left to crumble on the edge of hostile territory. (p.64).

Mostert himself is "like a volunteer who had agreed to, or had been ordered into standing a lone rearguard action" (p.64). The decaying service station stands "like an ignored flag of surrender" (p.64), reflecting not only its owner's miserable predicament, but also perhaps the inevitable and ignominious end of white privilege and private enterprise. That this sort of reading is supported by the text is corroborated by the following passage, in which La Guma seems to be flirting with an allegorical fusion of concrete detail and political prophesy:

> The white paint on the outside of the building had long been violated by the elements and careless drivers. There was history written in the fender-scars and the hub cap marks, the dried-up pools of grease like the congealed blood of dead business, in the chipped and battered enamel signs, and the torn and faded bunting like the shields and pennons of slain enterprise hung up for the last time in forlorn defiance. (p.65)

Although Mostert is peripheral to the main plot, through his encounters with Charlie and Susie Meyer he does contribute to the unfolding of the action. There are, however, several chapters in the novel which are quite detached from

the strands of narrative. They serve as interludes, heightening or relaxing tension as the momentum of the story is temporarily arrested, while at the same time filling out the fictional world -- something La Guma's lean and spare narrative style leaves him little time for.

Some of these chapters enlarge on the theme of dehumanization: Chapter Seven, for instance, which contains the description of Drunk Ria, that "squalid parody of a female" (p.53) who is barely recognisable as human. Like a "shopwindow dummy rescued from a sewer" and "crudely stuffed with odds and ends, dressed in a gown of sewn-up dishrags" (p.53), Ria "cursed and wept and laughed about her in a voice as harsh as a death rattle" (p.54). Drunk Ria *is* death-in-life, the consummate product of poverty's work of dehumanization.

The cameo of the shanty-town capitalist who makes his living by selling water to his neighbours (Ch.17) suggests that the system destroys exploiter and exploited alike:

> Water is profit. In order to make this profit, the one who sells the water must also use it to wash his soul clean of compassion. He must rinse his heart of pity, and with the bristles of enterprise, scrub his being sterile of sympathy. He must have the heart of a stop-cock and the brain of a cistern, intestines of lead pipes. (p.114)

These interludes, which stand in oblique relation to the narrative like a choric commentary, help to broaden the perspective of La Guma's social analysis, while at the same time establishing a compelling sense of rhythm. However, that *And a Threefold Cord* is La Guma's most effective work of protest is attributable not to the profundity or accuracy of its social analysis, but to the skill of La Guma's characterization, which evokes men and women of flesh and blood, not extrapolations of political theory. In *A Walk in the Night* La Guma offers an intellectual understanding of Michael Adonis's

predicament, which, because it construes him wholly as a victim, entails a formal kind of pity. But in this novel, we believe in Charlie Pauls himself, not just what he stands for; we share his hopes and disappointments and are genuinely moved by his suffering; we can identify with him because he is presented as a human agent rather than a helpless pawn of social forces. The lesson we begin to learn in this: that *And a Threefold Cord* is a successful protest work because it moves us deeply; that it moves us because we can identify with the character of Charlie Pauls; and that Charlie is a sympathetic character *in spite of* the ideological burden he is made to bear, regardless of our disposition towards that ideology. Unfortunately La Guma never again invests his portrayal of character with the same degree of compassion, insight and understanding. The battle lines are being drawn up and we are about to enter *The Stone Country*, where human worth is measured by the force of gun and muscle.

CHAPTER FIVE

The action of *The Stone Country*[1] comprises the experiences of a few days in the life of George Adams, a Coloured activist arrested for a political offence. As Adams slips apprehensively into the routine of prison life, he strikes up a friendship with Yusef the Turk, who advises him to toe the line and keep our of trouble during his time inside. Nevertheless Adams makes an enemy of the white warder by boldly demanding that he be issued with the regulation kit. The popularity which this action earns him amongst the other prisoners poses a threat to the authority of Butcherboy, a sadistic brute whose massive physical strength enables him to exercise a tyrannous domination over the weaker inmates. With the approval of the warder, Butcherboy determines to deal with Adams and attempts to intimidate him. But Adams stands firm and Yusef comes to his aid with a direct challenge to Butcherboy's supremacy. The two men agree to settle their differences in unarmed combat. Yusef seems to be gaining the upper hand in a long gruelling battle when Butcherboy suddenly drops stone dead, stabbed by an unseen hand. His killer is in fact a youth known as the Casbah Kid, awaiting trial for murder, who has thus avenged an earlier beating at the hands of the thug.

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[1] *The Stone Country* (1967; rpt. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1974). All page references are to the Heinemann edition.

After further confrontation with the white guard, Adams finds himself sharing a cell in the Isolation Block with the Casbah Kid, who has deliberately perpetrated a minor misdemeanour to remove himself from the wake of suspicion following the death of Butcherboy. Adams gradually wears down the reserve of the taciturn murderer and as a relationship grows, he becomes the Kid's reluctant confessor. Meanwhile in the next cell a long-term convict, Gus, is planning a break in which his two cell-mates have no option but to join him. When the time comes, however, it is Gus who, crouching on the roof within an ace of freedom, cannot control his fear and gives the game away. He and his friend Morgan are recaptured and brutally beaten, while the third man, who ironically wanted no part of the escape bid, manages to get away.

The next day the Casbah Kid appears in court and is sentenced to death. The novel ends as he takes his leave of George Adams before being escorted to the train which will take him to Death Row in Pretoria.

Apart from a brief chapter describing the arrest of George Adams and the events leading up to it, the entire novel is set within the walls of what is presumably Roeland Street gaol in Cape Town. This geographical concentration is offset by a diffusion of chronology which is characteristic also of the earlier novels. In these, however, La Guma uses the time shift primarily to facilitate the pursuance of several contemporaneous narrative strands without impeding the overall narrative momentum. In *The Stone Country*, temporal shifts generally parallel a spatial shift between the Isolation Block (which locates the "now" of the novel's first chapter) and the General Remand Section, where Adams is initially detained; their function is simply to create suspense and exploit the tension deriving from information witheld from the reader.

In the opening paragraphs of the novel, for instance, La Guma establishes an arc of tension which achieves a partial resolution only in the closing paragraphs. We are introduced to a boy murderer who "would probably never see the outside world again or have to bother about time" (p.12), and who seems, moreover, quite unconcerned about the fact. In a chilling parody of filial emulation, we see the Casbah Kid treading in his father's footsteps to the gallows in Pretoria; his bleak fatalism is entirely appropriate: "Everybody got their life and death put out, reckon and think.... You can't change things *mos*" (p.14). But his cell-mate George Adams is a man of altogether different temperament and persuasion; he believes that things *can* be changed: indeed, his arrest and incarceration are the direct result of this belief. And so the stage is set for a confrontation between Adams' simple humanistic ideals and the blank pessimism of the Casbah Kid, a stage "hemmed in by iron and stone" with an "atmosphere of every-man-for-himself" (p.37) which is by no means an impartial backdrop.

George Adams is awaiting trial for "illegal organisation":

> [He] did not have any regrets about his arrest. You did what you decided was the right thing, and then accepted the consequences. He had gone to meetings and had listened to the speeches, had read a little, and had come to the conclusion that what had been said was right. He thought, falling into dreamless sleep, there's a limit to being kicked in the backside....(p.74).

We are reminded of Willieboy's last thought as he succumbs to an equally dreamless oblivion at the end of *A Walk in the Night*, "They's always kicking a poor bastard around", and the echo has a double significance. First, it measures the political development of La Guma's major characters, from the morally inert ghosts in *A Walk in the Night*; through Charlie Pauls, modest champion of humane values; to George Adams, a committed political activist.[2]

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[2] This progression reaches its logical conclusion in the militancy of Beukes in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*.

The echo also suggests the central irony of Adams' situation. He is in gaol for refusing to be kicked around by the state: the crime is the state's, not his. Indeed he is a member of the "criminal element" only in the sense of social commitment embodied in Eugene Debs' famous dictum which is the novel's epigraph.

> While there is a lower class, I am in it.
> While there is a criminal element, I am of it.
> While there is a soul in jail, I am not free.

On arrival at the prison, George Adams feels "like an immigrant entering a new and strange country, wondering what was going to happen to him" (p.20). Adams is indeed a foreigner, unfamiliar with the people and customs of the stone country. The social gap between himself and the other convicts is suggested as early as the truck ride to the goal, when he feels repelled by the stinking mass of humanity around him and longs for a bath and a shave. He is unable to eat the prison food the others consume with relish, and when he is entrusted with Yusef's dentures before the fight with Butcherboy, he handles them gingerly, feeling "somewhat ridiculous". After the fatal fight he vomits with shock and disgust while the other prisoners turn over and go to sleep. That this is no mere bourgeois fastidiousness La Guma is careful to assure us: Adams has "grown up in the slums" (p.37) and has been, perhaps still is, a factory worker (p.41). He speaks the same slang dialect as the other prisoners and, most important of all, has the same skin colour. What really distinguishes him from the rest is his simple moral decency, a quality which Yusef the Turk acknowledges when he warns Butcherboy that Adams "...is good people, man. Not your kind, not my kind even" (p.67). For Adams has brought with him an approach to life and an attitude towards his fellows quite alien to this community which ignores the moral imperatives of communality and breathes "an atmosphere of every-man-

for-himself". In the absence of humane restraints, "the country behind the coastline of laws and regulations" (p.81) bends to the sway of brute force:

> The strong preyed on the weak, and the strong and brutal acknowledged a sort of nebulous alliance among themselves for the terrorization of the underlings. (p.37).

The consequent dehumanization of both bully and toady is depicted by La Guma, in the best tradition of Naturalism, in terms of rampant animal imagery: the prison becomes

> ...a jungle of iron and stone, inhabited by jackals and hyenas, snarling wolves and trembling sheep, entrapped lions fighting off shambling monsters with stunted brains and bodies armoured with the hide of ignorance and brutality, trampling underfoot those who tried to claw their way from the clutch of the swamp. (p.81)

Adams breaks one of the 'laws' of this jungle by offering his cell-mates a cigarette. Yusef the Turk delivers a sharp rebuke:

> "Hell, what for you giving tobacco away?
> These baskets can find their own, *mos*, don't I say?"

-- to which Adams replies, "hell... We all in this... together" (p.39). And later, Adams refuses to let the "small fry" tidy up the cell alone, as Yusef recommends, saying

> "Well, we're all in here together, man.... Might as well share the work" (p.51)

George Adams' kindness and generosity are an expression both of his individual personality and of the ideal of proletarian solidarity for which he has temporarily sacrificed his freedom. He is endowed with a naturally sensitive

and sympathetic disposition, and his gestures of friendliness do not merely enact the dry abstractions of political rhetoric. In the cat-and-mouse game of life, he reflects, he is always

> "...on the side of the mouse, of all mice... on the side of the little animals, the weak and the timid who spent all their lives dodging the duckling". (pp.127-8)

However, it is George Adams' political insight that enables him to see who the real cats and mice are, to perceive that he and all his fellow-prisoners are equally victims of a predatory system: "...everybody locked up behind bars here is with us" (p.92).

These fellow-prisoners are a veritable "human salad" (p.80):

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

A more disparate agglomeration of humanity would be hard to find, and yet each will receive precisely the same treatment during his time in jail. However, when we ask what these murderers and pass-offenders do have in common, and notice that their common initiation into prison life consists of a ritual submission to the baas/kaffir relation on which the dispensation of prison authority is based, it becomes evident that La Guma is condemning not only a particular penal system. Only a black man has to carry a pass in South Africa, and only a black man can be arrested for failing to do so: the generic crime of which all these men are guilty is that of not being white. Of course, La Guma's environmentalist view of crime does not simplistically exculpate black murderers and rapists. All George Adams can promise the Casbah Kid is that "there will certainly be more sympathy" for "people like us...people in prison" (pp.118-9) when the regime is toppled.

But in the meantime Adams can pity the boy killer as a "slap-happy" mouse, a punch-drunk victim of the social and economic deprivation apartheid engenders:

> People got knocked slap-happy by life, too, and did funny things. Like that Casbah Kid over there. I wish he'd talk, say something.... But he's slap-happy. Like he'd been in a boxing ring all his life and was slap-happy from it. Well, he killed a man, didn't he? Deep down, perhaps, he had not meant to kill anybody. But he was punch-drunk and he just out with that knife. (p.128).

In this view, a criminal act is little more than mechanical response to stimulus, a view which is convincingly dramatized in the story of the Casbah Kid. After hearing the Kid's horrifying disclosures we are inclined to give the nod to his gloomy determinism:

> "Hear me mister, I put a knife in a *juba*. He went dead. Is put out, like. Everybody got his life and death put out, reckon and think". (p.14)

The pronouncements of the Judge who passes sentence on the young murderer provide an obvious yet powerfully ironic antiphon:

> "It has been advanced, on behalf of the accused, that he comes from a class and from surroundings where violence and drunkenness are an everyday occurrence. This cannot be accepted as an excuse". (p.166).

The emotional nerve of *The Stone Country* runs through the encounter between George Adams and the Casbah Kid. To begin with, the boy with eyes "hard and grey and cold as pebbles on a beach when the tide goes out" (p.25) is "as unapproachable as a wave-washed rock" (p.57), "wrapped up in his own personal armour of silence, hiding his secret thoughts under invisible layers of dispassionate blankness" (p.114). George Adams' initial efforts to communi-

cate with him are as effective as "tackling a safe with a soft tool" (p.60, c.f. p.12); but he is not discouraged, and gradually breaks down the Kid's "invisible armour" (p.59) of suspicion. Eventually Adams suceeds in winning the Casbah Kid's confidence to the extent that the boy is ready to divulge the dark secret which above all else has rendered him incommunicado, the most sordid of the "series of pictures, shoddy, dog-eared, smudged pictures of dirty scenes" which are his only "recollections of life" (p.128). Although afterwards the Kid once more withdraws into himself, the effect of "tearing a page from the murky book of his mind" (p.155) has been salutory: he accepts George Adams' generosity with less reluctance and even shows signs of personal warmth towards him (p.164-5). And when he is finally taken away, La Guma contrives to make the most unsentimental of farewells strongly moving:

> George Adams saw the boy come up. The guards made no move to stop him, and George Adams saw him on the other side of the wire screen. Fingers with bitten nails touched the screen, and for an infinitestimal instant there was a flicker of light in the cold, grey eyes, like a spark of faulty electricity. The bitter mouth cracked slightly into one of its rare grins.
> "So long mister," The Casbah Kid said.
> George Adams nodded. He said, "So long, mate."
> Then the boy turned away and went back to the guards and George Adams watched them all go downstairs. The door below slammed shut and the lock grated, leaving him alone again, with the scribbled walls, the smell of tobacco and blankets and the chuckling sound of the wind.
> (p.168).

This is the note on which the novel ends, and once again it is a note of hope; hope tempered with the realization that for the Casbah Kid it is too little and too late.

Not only does this strand of the narrative enable La Guma to evoke the tragedy of the "slap-happy" victim of social forces, it also carries

the burden of one of his most abiding thematic concerns. "People was just made to be together" (Charlie Pauls) simply because, as George Adams insists, "we're all in this....together". The prison Superintendant's advice to the condemned killer, "From now on you got to keep your eyes on the Man Up There" (p.167) acquires the obvious irony of the inapposite as we recall the Casbah Kid's avowed indifference to the fate of his soul: "'Heaven or Hell. I don't give a damn where I go when they swing me'" (p.13). But the more profound and bitter irony is that the Casbah Kid would not be where he is, on Death Row, had he during his life kept his eyes on the Men Down Here, on the fellow human beings amidst whom he has lived in anchoritic aloofness. By trying "to do things alone" like Ronald Pauls, Albert March has turned his back on the commonality of being which in La Guma's vision is the only true moral lodestar. As 'the Casbah Kid', an outlaw, his condition of exile has resulted in a crime which is an abomination to humanity; a crime which reduces his own humanity in the degree to which it reduces the value of another's life. Nonetheless, we are encouraged to accept George Adams' view of the boy as the victim of relentless social pressures.

George Adams' challenging ideas also begin to work on other inmates of the prison. Yusef the Turk, cool, dangerous aristocrat of the underworld, is initially scornful of Adams' naïvety, and amicably but patronisingly offers to look after him. For he has learnt that

> '...the only johns who get by in this place is them what know how to get things done for them, them what is hard case enough to make others listen, and maybe them that licks the guard's jack.' (p.51).

But when he intervenes to protect Adams from Butcherboy he unconsciously(?) echoes the political prisoner's words: "'Hell, man, we's all here together in the wrong place, don't I say'" (p.67). His growing respect for George

Adams is occasioned partly by the latter's courageous example in standing up for his rights, trivial as they are in the stone country. Despite Yusef's warning that "'Only these....warders got rights. *They* tell you what is rights'" (p.51), George Adams refuses to be intimidated by the warder -- notably, by ignoring the other's attempts to reduce their interaction to the *baas/jong* pattern -- and claims his right to have blankets (p.61) and a drinking vessel (p.75).

George Adams' modest triumphs challenge the whole structure of prison society, which is based upon a pecking order of delegated tyranny. Apart from the institutionalized delegation which allows the hardened long-term convicts "to exert the precarious authority vested in them by their watchful masters" (p.18), there is an unofficial but equally effective hierarchy of power. The structure of this hierarchy is made explicit after the first confrontation between Adams and the prison guard:

> Behind him, the guard looked over at Butcherboy, the brute man, who lounged against the rough, stone-constructed wall of one side of the yard, and smiled a wintry smile, saying, "[Adams] is *mos* one of these *slim* men. He's looking for trouble."
> And Butcherboy shifted his great shoulders against the wall and grinned, saying "Old boss, he *is* looking for trouble. A clever." (p.63).

After the second incident, "[Butcherboy's] mind, rusty, but treacherous as a forgotten bear trap, wondered whether he could do the *baas* a favour by dealing with this clever" (p.76). For Butcherboy is both lackey and tyrant; the authorities depend on men of his ilk to extend the system of oppression into "the country behind the coastline of laws and regulations" (p.81), where legislation cannot penetrate. The allegience which Butcherboy commands is founded on hate and fear (p.33) but it devolves from

the repressed but all the more intense hatred which the prisoners have for the white warders. Adams' defiant attitude unites all the prisoners in delighted approval, even the mainstay of Butcherboy's "obsequious retinue", Brakes Peterson (p.77). Thus the brutish demagogue senses "a threatened shift of allegiance" and determines to expedite the crushing of the upstart. In the character of Butcherboy, La Guma has dramatized one form of reaction to the coërcive system: the thug mentality which replicates and re-inforces the effects of the system by seeking to exert compensatory "equivalent domination"[3] over the fellow-oppressed. Although few readers will feel the slightest twinge of pity when the bell tolls for Butcherboy, George Adams' insight that the thug was also a "mouse", a victim in the larger game of South African life, enables him to feel "...infinitely sad all of a sudden, as if he was abandoning the body of a friend during a retreat" (p.107).

That La Guma's analysis extends beyond the immediate locale of Roeland Street gaol is patently obvious, and it may be instructive to examine more closely the way in which "the stone country" comes to represent South Africa itself.

When George Adams is parted from his African colleague on arrival at the prison, Jefferson wryly remarks:

> "This jail is something of what they want to make the country. Everybody separate, boy: White, African, Coloured. Regulations for everybody, and a white boss with a gun and a stick." (p.20).

Later, Adams himself "[curses] the whole country that was like a big stone prison, anyway" (p.58). The treatment received by the prisoners is both

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[3] David Rabkin, "Alex La Guma and Reality in South Africa," p.55.

separate and unequal: for instance, the breakfast menu is "plain corn mush for Non-Whites; mush with milk and sugar and slices of bread for the whites". (p.50), a practice which the Coloured prisoners resent (p.55). When the Casbah Kid has been condemned to death, he receives a 'special' supper; a particularly tawdry sentimental gesture for, as George Adams observes, the meal is what "they usually gave to ordinary white prisoners" (p.166).

The warders are in the first instance white men, "baase," and not simply officials with a job to do. When George Adams explains why he has been sent to the Isolation Block, Morgan comments: "' White man don't like no talking back, hey'" (p.132). And little Solly construes the prison break in which he is involved as a direct threat to "'these white men'" (p.57). But the whites are equally entrapped by the fortress which incarcerates the blacks:

> Guards and prisoners, everybody, were the enforced inhabitants of another country, another world. (p.18)
>
> It occurred to [George Adams] that all guards in a prison were pratically prisoners themselves, that they lived most of their working life behind stone walls and bars; they were manacled to the other end of the chain. (p.106).

The labyrinth of locked doors and sealed compartments is a particularly appropriate metaphor for the barriers of suspicion and prejudice which divide South African society; but once again La Guma's protest goes deeper than the mere voicing of humanistic scruples. For it is the quiddity of 'prison', as system, to have prisoners and guards; the roles are dictated by the extended system which makes criminals of the majority of its participants. Thus we trace the ground of the protest to an environment "where violence and drunkenness are an everyday occurrence " (p.166), the ghetto of *A Walk in the Night*, where economic deprivation breeds criminals to order.

Even the physical appearance of the jailhouse is symbolically suggestive of a history of corruption, gradually legitimised through institution and constitution:

> It had been built in the last century, during Victorian times, and over the years bits and pieces had been added to its interior, alterations made here and there, and because it could not expand outwards, it had closed in upon itself in a warren of cells, cages, corridors and yards.
>
> Outside, the facade had been brightened with lawns and flower-beds: the grim face of an executioner hidden behind a holiday mask. The brasswork on the castellated main door was polished to perfection, and the flagged pathway up to it, kept spotless, as if at any moment it would receive some dignitary or other. It waited like a diseased harlot, disguised in finery, to embrace an unsuspecting customer. (p.17)

Finally, what hope of redress? As in his previous work, La Guma asserts that only through solidarity can the oppressed hope to challenge the authority of their masters, and again he indicates that such solidarity is possible. The prisoners enjoy a temporary comaraderie when engaged in communal tasks such as cleaning the yard (p.60) or, incongruously enough, hymn-singing (p.135); but most notably during the escape bid of Gus and his friends, when all are united in jeering at the warders and cheering on the escapees: "the solidarity of the underworld" (p.156), as George Adams wryly reflects. Perhaps most significant of all is the spontaneous impulse which leads Koppe to join in Gus's carefully planned attack on the warder at the quarry, an impulse he is unable to rationalize. "'Hell, I didn't mean to, *mos*. It just happened, likely. Something made me do it!" (p.100). The suppressed hatred which the prisoners bear towards the whites is such that spontaneous group reaction is a real possibility; for Koppe is by nature a timorous, not a violent man.

Reduced to essentials, *The Stone Country* is a good yarn based on an obvious irony: the good guys are behind bars and the bad guys are the ones who are keeping them there. How effective is the novelist's dramatization of this moral reversal? How does he contrive to present a bunch of thugs, rapists, dope-pedlars and murderers as morally superior to their law-enforcing captors?

La Guma's solution is simple. He adopts an environmentalist view of crime and indicates that it is the system, and not its product, which is morally capable. His method, as we have seen, is equally straightforward. He introduces a character whose presence structures and evaluates the fictional mileau on the reader's behalf. The moral issues as La Guma presents them are such that we willingly acquiesce in George Adams' judgement that his fellow-prisoners are "slap-happy" mice, the innocent victims of an iniquitous system. But when we move out of the presented world and back into the real world, and come to consider the efficacy of the novel as social protest, the inadequacy of this judgement becomes obvious. Adams' attitude -- and La Guma's, for there is no evidence of the slightest discrepancy between the two -- is sentimental and patronising and affords a facile and specious consolation. It is all too easy to lavish pity on men once they have been reduced to the level of helpless animals. But our experience rejects this reduction; it discards as metaphorical what La Guma offers as literal. The fact is that, chiefly through sensational and superficial methods of characterization, La Guma has created a fictional world too artificial and stylized, too "literary" to ever be mistaken for the real world. We accept that the Cashbah Kid is a poor punch-drunk mouse because it is consistent with the portrayal of all the other sub-human

denizens of La Guma's underworld; we willingly suspend our disbelief for the duration of the literary performance. But we can hardly be expected to carry this premise out into the real world, still less to act upon it.

The problem of characterization, and its implication for the social impact of La Guma's work, becomes acute in La Guma's next novel, *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*.

CHAPTER SIX

La Guma's fourth and most recent novel, *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* (1972), is an ominous work not only because it announces the impending collapse of a system "...reaching the end of the road and going downhill towards a great darkness" (p.6). It is ominous also in the sense that it points to the end of La Guma's career as a novelist. This claim is based partly on a consideration of the novel's content, partly on a consideration of its form, but mostly on the assumption that La Guma is unlikely to abandon the set of ideas which has so far dominated his work.

One of the more obvious patterns of development in La Guma's fiction from *A Walk in the Night* to *The Stone Country* is constituted by the steadily increasing political awareness and activity of the major characters. This pattern achieves an abrupt and conclusive consummation in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, and for La Guma to continue to be a literary realist, to comment on political conditions in South Africa, and to draw on his own experience, it seems he must choose among three impossible alternatives.

If he is to continue to "depict actuality in its revolutionary development"[1], he might write the same novel all over again (that is, one similar in essential character types, action and setting), clinching its referentiality by revising and updating certain attitudes, situations and 'statements of fact'; but this is a task unlikely to appeal even to La Guma's stern sense of dedication, much less to any publisher's. He ought, logically, to depict the revolutionary movement further along the road to victory, but that would be to falsify. For while it is true that the politicization of the black masses continues apace in South Africa, and stonings and arson become endemic in the urban townships, it is also true that the gold price is on the rise again. The revolution does not proceed in leaps and bounds: the power structure in South Africa has yet to experience more than the slightest tremor, and the fact must be faced that the recent unrest has amounted to little more than an excuse for the Government to strengthen its position with a flood of highly effective detentions, bannings and proscriptions. La Guma could produce a genuine work of revolutionary realism if he were to focus on a radical black student leader in Soweto, or on the leader of a gang of guerillas laying landmines and dodging Army patrols in the Northern Transvaal. But how successful such a work might be -- how 'authentic', particularly -- is another matter. An accurate presentation of armed struggle or Soweto in 1977 would seem beyond the creative powers of La Guma (judging by what he has revealed so far), or indeed most novelists operating on second-hand

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[1] A.A. Zhdanov at the First All-Soviet Congress of Writers, August 17, 1934, quoted in *Documents of Modern Literary Writing*, ed. George J. Becker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p.487.

information within similar artistic constraints. Already the effects of almost a decade of exile are beginning to be felt in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*: the masterly selection and arrangement of concrete detail, so striking a feature of the earlier novels, is conspicuously absent here. Descriptions of setting rehearse set-pieces from *A Walk in the Night* but contribute little to the creation of atmosphere (eg. pp.26-27, 61). The effect is like a switch from technicolour to black and white, or the blurring and loss of freshness which occurs when an anecdote is recounted at second or third hand. La Guma could, perhaps, choose to set his novel in the period he knows best and, if, Beukes' sentimentality in *In the Fog of the Season's End* is anything to go by, which La Guma himself recalls most fondly. The decade from the Treason Trial arrests in 1956 until his escape in 1966 encompassed years of intermittent political activity, imprisonment and house arrest, and there can be no doubt that they were bitter and frustrating years for La Guma and his family. But they were also years of action and anger, when he must surely have known the sheer excitement of danger, the exhileration of crusade and the fulfilment of sacrifice. Back in those heady days after Sharpville, with the people on the move and revolution in the air, it must have seemed at times that victory was almost within reach: and now, perhaps, disillusion lingers on not so much in the disappointment of defeat as in the impotence and atrophy of exile. Whether or not La Guma could recapture in this hypothetical next novel the same vital immediacy which suffuses the earlier novels is debatable. He is unlikely to try, however, for unless he were to radically revise his historical perspective, he would have to betray the artistic programme of his chosen ideology. Moreover, by entering what is now strictly speaking the domain of historical fiction, he would seriously impair the potential social impact of his work as protest literature.

In any case, La Guma is already in trouble with dates, facts and policy in *In the Fog of the Season's End*. A certain inconsistency emerges when we attempt to assign a date to the fictional present of the novel. From information given about Elias Tekwane's past in chapters 6 and 12 we are able to calculate his birthdate as falling between 1924 and 1928.[2] Given the discrepency of three years between the age on his identity documents ("almost fifty") and his real age ("just over forty" p.123) we arrive at a date for the action of the novel somewhere between 1968 and 1973. Since the book was published in 1972, we may assume that La Guma's aim was a faithful portrayal of "contemporary" conditions in South Africa, say, not altogether arbitrarily, in 1970.

However, as Anthony Chennells has pointed out, the novel provides an accurate account of left-wing activities in South Africa about a decade before.[3] This is not to say that activities such as the holding of candestine meetings, the painting of slogans, the distribution of pamphlets, and other non-violent forms of resistance were not taking place in 1970: what lacks consistency is La Guma's attitude towards them. For Chennells notes that the Communist Party had decided in the mid-Sixties, several years prior to the novel's publication, that this kind of action had proved futile and that their objective was henceforth a purely military one.

> But nowhere does La Guma show that he agrees with this. His activists are proletarian heroes and their activities have profound political significance...La Guma although he is writing well after the event and in the

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[2] We learn that he was too young to enlist at the beginning of the Second World War, but old enough to obtain a work pass before the end of the War; i.e., he could have been as old as 15 in 1939 or as young as seventeen in 1945.

[3] Anthony Chennells, "Alex La Guma and the South African Political Novel," *Mambo Magazine* 1 Nov. 1974, p.16.

> safety of England will not face up to the implications of what his own party believes: that his heroes were involved in a process that produced nothing except their own imprisonment. Those who were captured and allegedly tortured were revolutionaries who had failed in their objective. [4]

It may be objected that this complaint, reduced to essentials, merely draws on the type of humourless absurdity characteristic of totalitarianism. In 1966 it was permissible for a fictional revolutionary to believe "You did what you decided was the right thing, and then accepted the consequences" (George Adams, *Stone Country* p.74), but in 1972 it was not, nor will be until the party decrees otherwise.

However, Chennells' next remark suggests that the real thrust of his criticism is directed elsewhere:

> If La Guma were really attempting to write a serious political novel about South Africa he would show the pathos of [the revolutionaries'] pointless sacrifice, admit that the police were a great deal stronger than the left wing and would certainly not inflate their activities to heroism.[5]

In other words, La Guma's flag-waving has produced not an interpretation but a distortion of reality, a distortion sufficiently gross to destroy *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*'s value as a "serious political" or protest novel. The objection that such a judgement is extrinsic and 'non-literary', in that it proceeds from and gestures towards states-of-affairs independent of those projected in the novel itself, has already been fielded in Part One of this study. Nonetheless I will attempt to show that, in its final distillation this is primarily an aesthetic and artistic problem and certainly not one that may be resolved through an appeal to Marxist imperatives.

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[4] ibid.

[5] ibid.

To begin with, La Guma is unable to "show the pathos of... pointless sacrifice" or "admit that the police were a great deal stronger than the left wing" -- unable, even, to convince us of the heroism of his freedom-fighters -- simply because his handling of character is hopelessly inadequate. Lewis Nkosi, La Guma's best critic, was satisfied in 1965 that "most of La Guma's characters have the weight and value of real living people",[6] but a few years later had to confess that "something was beginning to worry him about each novel that comes out from La Guma".[7] Writing after the publication of *The Stone Country*, he traces the source of his reservations to "the almost wilful limitation which La Guma places upon himself by working almost totally within what is essentially a short story mould".[8] Bernth Lindfors is another critic who has regretted La Guma's failure to adapt his narrative skills to the demands of the novel form, and both he and Nkosi single out characterization as the most conspicuous manifestation of this failure. On the restricted canvas of the short story, Lindfors argues, especially the kind in which situation is superordinate, the writer may employ a "swifter, blunter, more direct" approach to character, an approach which, in the "more complex, more comprehensive literary form" of the novel tends to produce "types" rather than individuals.[9] And this is the basis of Nkosi's complaint that there is something lacking in La Guma's

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6 Lewis Nkosi, review of *And a Threefold Cord*, *The New African* 4, No. 3 (1965), 71.

7 Nkosi, "Alex La Guma: the man and his work," p.6.

8 ibid.

9 Bernth Lindfors, "Form and Technique in the Novels of Richard Rive and Alex La Guma," p.15. Indeed, relatively "dimensionless" characters are often necessary to sustain the unity of effect which is the short story's characteristic strength.

treatment of a character like Susie Meyer in *And a Threefold Cord*:

> ...the feeling lingers that there is more in the girl that La Guma allows us to see. It is simply not good enough that we know she is the product of the slums and a society as cruel as the South African one. People's failures are after all individual ones and their deaths are individual deaths.[10]

None of La Guma's characters is endowed with abundant individuality and even the major figures are denied all but the most perfunctory kind of inner life. Yet it would be a mistake to attribute this wholly to the author's affinity for a particular literary form. As a protest writer, La Guma is concerned not with the fate of any particular individual but with the condition of a whole society; his cardinal purpose, as David Rabkin reminds us is "to enlarge our understanding not of the characters but of their situation".[11] His method is to reduce the moral character of that situation to its political determinants. Consequently in a work in which "character is the exhibition of alternative responses to the political situation",[12] there is no room for the fully-rounded, minutely discriminated personality. Only those aspects of character which release some political significance are relevant to the writer's purposes. We might therefore describe La Guma's characters as "political types", for their typicality is framed by political criteria.

According to this view, the "almost wilful limitation which La Guma places upon himself" merely indicates his fidelity to an unusually ruthless artistic principle: he shows us nothing of Susie Meyer's hopes and dreams because it is not artistically expedient for him to do so. Yet the suspicion

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[10] Nkosi, "Alex La Guma: the man and his work," p.7.

[11] David Rabkin, "Alex La Guma and Reality in South Africa," p.55.

[12] ibid. p.60.

remains that La Guma shows us so little of his characters not because he is a particularly disciplined craftsman but because he believes that there is nothing more to show. The real issue is La Guma's view of man, which he expresses in his handling of character in spite of, rather than because of, the orientation of his work as protest literature.

As a Marxist -- or rather, as one who espouses a peculiarly joyless mechanist-determinist version of Marxism-Leninism -- La Guma conceives of man as the product of his social environment. From here it is but a short step to the assumption that the description of a man -- or, at least, a description of the significant aspects of his being -- may be exhausted in the description of the material conditions of his life. Such a premise helps to account for the relentless accretion of concrete detail which is so prominent a feature of narrative texture in the first two novels. The ugly catalogue of sights, odours and textures is equally an inventory of the souls of those who see, smell and feel. This primacy of the material world over the human mind renders secondary, even derivative, the inner life of hopes, dreams and self-communings, which is (according to received literary tradition) the quiddity of the individual's "identity" or "personality". As Marx writes in the *Critique of Political Economy*, "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness".[13] Personality itself, according to the Polish philosopher Schaff, "is only a specific determinateness of the human individual and belongs to it like its physical appearance".[14]

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[13] Quoted by H.B. Acton, "Historical Materialism," *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1967), p.17.

[14] A Schaff, *Marxismus und das menschliche Individuum*, quoted by Helmut Fleischer in "The Acting Subject in Historical Materialism," *Philosophy in the Soviet Union*, ed. Ervin Laszlo (Dordrecht: Reidel 1967), p.18.

Whatever the truth or practical value of this psychological postulate, there can be no denying that it leads to impoverishment and over-simplification in its artistic application. In *A Walk in the Night* it is all too easy to tell the mind's complexion in the face -- "the worn, brutalized, wasted, slum-scratched faces of the poor", the "cold blue light" of the policeman's eyes. The characters possess no dimensions to which we feel the novelist alone has privilege of access, and the apparent opacity of a character like Susie Meyer derives simply from a feeling that we have been cheated by an 'explanation' of her being that, by equating her with the causal (material) determinants of her behaviour, is too simplistic.

It may be objected, with some justification, that this criticism merely bespeaks a prejudice equal and opposite to La Guma's; and it must be admitted that an appeal to an intuitive consensus on what 'people are really like' requires some clarification. What we mean is that in a work which places us in the here-and-now of characters who purport to be real people, we expect the illusion we all share -- if illusion it be -- that we have certain freedoms of choice and a degree of responsibility for our actions (how else could we act?) to be shared also by those characters. To insist on this is perhaps critically unsound, for according to what E.M. Forster calls the "aesthetic argument", each novel is "a work of art, with its own laws, which are not those of daily life, and... a character in a novel is real when it lives in accordance with such laws".[15] Yet it is precisely because of contradictions within the system of 'laws' projected by La Guma's fiction, primarily an inherent contradiction between means and aims, that his work can never be entirely convincing. For the

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[15] E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Arnold, 1974 -- the Abinger Edition), p.43.

novels to have any value as serious protest writing, they must purport to be realistic, to provide a full and authentic report of an area of human experience. But La Guma's conception of the real is an ideal in that it is governed by theoretical presuppositions to which the living reality is made to conform. It leads him to impose a system of values upon the fictive world of the novel which determines in advance the position to be taken with respect to human beings and events. In this sense it is apriori and non-empirical. Now "imaginative writing cannot include fixed and systematic definitions of reality without violating its own existential character".[16] La Guma's view of man may or may not be true, but it must be described as idealistic rather than realistic. As one critic puts it, "A really faithful representation of life cannot be achieved within a dialectic based on teleological concepts".[17] La Guma's handling of interiority reflects this status. The outer rather than the inner life is paramount and primary. Instead of starting in the mind of the character and tracing the way in which thought develops into action, La Guma regards the action itself as given. Whatever insight he allows the reader into the character's inner life has the sole function of accounting for that character's actions: it elaborates and defines the causal connection between material environment and conditioned response.

There is a further, equally damaging contradiction in La Guma's treatment of character. If, as Fanon puts it, racism is simply the "epidermalization" of classism, the processes of South African society

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[16] Philip Rahv, "Notes on the Decline of Naturalism," in *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, ed. George J. Becker, p.581.

[17] Becker, "Modern Realism as a Literary Movement," Introduction to *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, p.23.

are in essence no different from those of any other Capitalist society. According to Marxism-Leninism, such processes may be explained "...as if they were the workings of some alien, non-human entity in which individuals are caught up as in some monstrous mechanism."[18] Whether capitalist or worker, the individual is therefore a radically subordinated being who lacks the capacity to be morally accountable for his actions, except in a highly relative sense. Consequently the proponent of historical materialism who wishes to inject moral value into his analysis of capitalist society finds himself in a quandary. If La Guma genuinely believes that history is an "objective process" independent of the will of the people whose collective activity it purports to describe, he cannot 'blame' the white capitalist any more than the black worker for the evils of South African society. Yet his protest against these evils rests on the invocation of certain universally accepted humanitarian principles which predicate moral culpability. As we shall see, La Guma makes little attempt to reconcile the roles of moralist and sociologist. Of course, it is possible that any such attempt, particularly on the part of those who presume to predict a moral millenium on scientific grounds, is doomed to failure.

It is not surprising that most of the whites one meets in the pages of La Guma are the agents of officialdom, either directly (policemen) or indirectly (employers) involved in the implementation of apartheid. One readily accepts the implication that in South Africa these are the whites with whom black people have most close and frequent contact. What one

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[18] Acton, "Historical Materialism," p.16.

cannot accept without demur is the way in which these characters are presented. While La Guma goes to elaborate lengths to locate the morally reprehensible act of his Coloured characters (Adonis, Willieboy, Casbah Kid, Butcherboy, etc.) in an environmentalist perspective, nowhere does he extend the slightest compassion towards the whites whom the system has brutalized and dehumanized in equal measure. A slight exception is George Mostert, but his characterization is too schematic and symbolic to take us beyond the generalities of his "wretched pride in a false racial superiority" (*Threefold Cord* p.67). On the single occasion when La Guma attempts to probe beneath the image of "sirens, knuckles, boots"[19] into the pathology of police sadism, the result is embarassingly simplistic. Raalt murders Willieboy because Mrs. Raalt's suspected infidelity has put him into a murderous mood and because he has little respect for the life of a 'hotnot' in any case. The range of the 'explanation' is too narrow and superficial, bringing us no nearer to an understanding of what makes a fascist a fascist. The characterisation of Raalt is basically no different from that of the other whites in the novels. Their behaviour -- inevitably callous, cruel -- is offered as a given, a *fait accompli*. The reader who had hoped for some trenchant insight into the nature of South African society is likely to be disappointed. He is told, in effect, that white South Africans are the way they are "because they are white South Africans", or "because of the system", which is no less of a circularity.

But La Guma is hardly less superficial and evasive in his treatment of the other character types. If whites are villains, revolutionaries are heroes: those in between are either dismissed as "human salad" or

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[19] The title of a poem and a collection of poems by Dennis Brutus.

patronised as "victims". It is perfectly true that this approach to character serves tolerably well, although with decreasing effect, for the first three novels, where La Guma's concern is to "illuminate the moral character of the society".[20] But in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* it no longer suffices. Here the significance of character is played out at the level of action: what the novelist offers is "an illustration of the specific actions taken by those who represent the society and those who oppose it".[21] This emphasis on action is accompanied by a reduced emphasis on material environment. Physical surroundings retreat into the background as ideas and the forces which embody those ideas are paraded in the foreground. Unfortunately, although predictably, the diminished presence of a fully wrought, tangible physical environment has resulted in a reduction in the substance of the characters. Beukes and Tekwane exist not in terms of their environment but in terms of their revolutionary activity, and they are reducible to the slogans which justify that activity. (La Guma, it must be admitted, seems not wholly unaware of their tenuous status. For instance, when Beukes, who is elsewhere acknowledged to be "something of a flag-waver" (p.130), remarks that "'One does not like facing the fascist guns like sheep'", the narrator feels obliged to add: "It was like a slogan" [p.143]).

The characters of the two heroes are amplified by means of flashbacks which furnish information about their past. From these flashbacks and other evidence of their educational achievements, cultural interests,

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20 Rabkin, "Alex La Guma and Reality in South Africa," p.60.

21 ibid.

and political sophistication, we may with some justification describe them, relative to the remainder of the proletariat, as members of an emergent intelligentsia.[22] The significance of this is that, so far, it has been possible to attribute the severe restrictions which La Guma places upon the consciousness of his characters to the fact that these characters are drawn from the lowest end of the social and cultural scale. To be a workhorse is to think like a workhorse. But to be an angel of light, one would have thought, requires far more imagination and compassion than La Guma is prepared to grant his candidates. The characterization of Beukes and Tekwane is strictly subordinated to a scheme of political relevance: the imperatives of their political role usurp even what little is shown of their inner lives. Given, thus, the narrowness of La Guma's interpretation of what is potentially a wide range of human possibilities, we may venture a few tentative generalizations about the view of man which appears to inform that interpretation.

Such is the gravity and austerity of La Guma's moral vision that to question the authenticity of his humanitarian and philanthropic stance seems unthinkable. Yet we must somehow come to terms with the fact that the characters who populate his fictional South Africa are drearily uniform and disquietingly devoid of estimable qualities. Granted, he is intent on demonstrating the essential filthiness and beastliness of unregenerate bourgeois mankind. Agreed, his characters are spawned in the sub- or pre-human slime of capitalism, and given the brief which casts him in the role

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[22] It is worth noting that although Beukes informs us that he "used to work in a factory too, once" (*Seasons' End* p.41), we are given no indication as to what he does for a living now. We are not told that he is on a payroll of the Party, although he seems to be doing a full time job for them. For a writer whose chosen ideology maintains that the political activities of men are phenomenal, even epi-phenomenal, in comparison with their productive and economic activities, this is a serious omission.

of "engineer of the human soul "[23], he must be allowed to utilise whatever tendentious means -- exaggeration, distortion -- are at his disposal, in order to destroy and build anew. The problem is that La Guma's demolition is in a sense so effective that precious little hope of reconstruction remains. It must be remembered that the rigid psychology of his determinism is alien to modern Marxism and in its extremism not exceeded even by the Soviet Mechanists of the 1930s. It harks back to late 19th Century Naturalism, and one cannot help feeling that La Guma would be more at home in the spiritual company of Zola than of Malraux. It may be churlish to go so far as to suggest that Marxism has provided an otherwise pessimistic materialist with a conveniently redemptive escape route; that historical materialism is for La Guma essentially a rationalization of a profound disgust for the human condition as he sees it, particularly as he has experienced it in South Africa.[24] Yet it is true that he barely offers so much as a fleeting glimpse of a classless society where man might realise his full humanity through the harmony of a collective social order. In any case the millenium is a long way off, if millenium there ever be; and no genuine vision of the human condition can be built on distant possibilities. No one could call Swift a humanitarian because of the presence in *Gulliver's Travels* of those mythical paragons, the Houyhnhnms. The suspicions lingers that La Guma's materialism is at heart unregenerative; and paradoxically, aspects of his most recent novel, *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, seem to confirm that suspicion.

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[23] Josef Stalin, quoted by A.A. Zhdanov in *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, ed. George J. Becker, *op. cit.*, p. 487.

[24] See Willard Thorp, *American writing in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), p.183 (esp. accompanying footnote 5), for a brief description of philosophical links between nineteenth century Naturalism and Marxian materialism.

If La Guma's obsession with violence, ugliness, dirt and decay -- both physical and 'spiritual' -- is entirely explicable in terms of the corruptive effects of the system he is portraying, a system that of its nature turns out unlovely examples of humanity, then surely a figure like Beukes, the Party man who among La Guma's characters has achieved perhaps the greatest measure of freedom from the effects of environment, ought to be exempt from its grosser ravages. And although he can by no manner of means be described as a likeable or particularly estimable character, he is indeed spared the brunt of La Guma's jaundiced imagination. Yet shortly after meeting the girl he will eventually marry, Beukes, hope and harbinger of the new order, indulges in this alarming reflection:

> Looking at her he thought sentimentally that her face could be disfigured with a hammer and she would still look beautiful. Scars would not spoil her; instead they would give her face an added beauty.[25]

Now there is no indication that Beukes has in mind some inner, spiritual beauty that outward disfigurement is powerless to destroy. If this were the case, the thought would be a commonplace in the rhetoric of romantic love, and -- although disconcertingly brutal -- hardly worthy of further notice. But as it stands, the gratuitous violence of the sentiment is horrifying and grotesque. There is no suggestion that the qualifier "sentimentally" is intended to have ironic effect, and in the novel as a whole there is no discrepency of any note between the point of view of

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[25] *Seasons' End* p.41. The entire chapter, which describes the supposedly romantic encounter between Beukes and Francy, is permeated with images of violence and sordidity: maiming through factory accidents, a fatal car crash, a violent incident at a demonstration, a wife-beating husband, obscene graffitti, a set of overalls hanging "like a headless traitor on display", etc.

Beukes and that of the author/narrator. No function is served, no contribution to the over-all design is made by the ascription of the thought to Beukes, and it cannot be regarded as a deliberate device of characterization. We can only conclude that the sensibility of which the thought is expressive is not Beukes' but La Guma's. We might compare the following passage from *And a Threefold Cord*: although the excess here is particularly glaring, it may serve as a paradigm for the subversive effect of much of La Guma's "endless pouring forth of squalour".[26] The setting is the squatter settlement's rubbish dump:

> Once a new-born baby, strangled and wrapped in bloody newspapers had been found there. Actually, a wandering mongrel had been the first to make the discovery, and was in the process of devouring it, when some human had happened along. (pp. 152-3).

The protest against a disgusting indifference to the value of human life is registered in the description of the murdered baby. By speaking the unspeakable in the next sentence, La Guma shows that he has lost control. The sensationalism is not only supererogatory but also negatory and revocatory, for it indulges and exploits the very attitude against which the protest is directed -- the attitude which reduces a human life to an obscene object.

What has happened here, and happens, I think, in much of La Guma's work, is perhaps what Nietzsche warns against in *Beyond Good and Evil*. "Whoever fights monsters", he observes, "should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And when you look long into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you".[27] To much the same purpose seems

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[26] J.M. Coetzee, "Alex La Guma," in *English and South Africa*, ed. Alan Lennox-Short (Cape Town: Nasou, n.d.), p.112.

[27] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books), 1966. p.89.

A. Alvarez' remark in *The Savage God* that "when an artist holds a mirror up to nature he finds out who and what he is; but the knowledge may change him irredeemably so that he becomes that image.[28]

There is little point in pressing such an argument for sooner or later we must bump against the immovable monolith of Marxist dogma. Any objection to La Guma's view of man, the apologist would maintain, is merely revelatory of the antagonist's own bourgeois intellectual pusillanimity. He cannot bear to face certain actual concrete and abstract philosophical truths about existence. He cannot bear the artist's "terrifying honesty". But in so far as our examination of La Guma's work as protest literature is concerned, the stature of the objection is undiminished. As John Frazer puts it so succinctly in *Violence in the Arts*,

> The vision of the writer [who like La Guma ostentatiously rubs the reader's nose in the disagreeable], supposedly so unflinching, so devastatingly honest, etc., is usually so patently selective that the reader can identify its limits fairly quickly and then relax.[29]

In other words, there is the danger that the view of man in La Guma may be so obviously warped that the reader may "switch off" his deepest moral, even cognitive faculties, and dissociate the world presented in the novels from the real world, a disconnection fatal to the realization of the orientation of the protest work of literature. We shall return to this thesis in the course of an examination of certain aspects of the first chapter of *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*.

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28 A. Alvarez, *The Savage God" a Study of Suicide* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), p.32.

29 John Fraser, *Violence in the Arts* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p.115.

But first we must consider La Guma's positive moral counter to the forces which have blasted the humanity of his characters, namely, "human dignity". The first task here is to sort out what appears to be a confusion in the novels between two distinct meanings of the concept. On the one hand, there seems to be a demand that a man's "human dignity" be esteemed simply because he is a man. On the other hand, "human dignity" appears to denote something which attaches to the value of the particular qualities or accomplishments of the individual in his social role, that is, his social significance. Now if human dignity is the inalienable property of all men, then not only freedom fighters but also depraved criminals and (in the South African context as La Guma presents it) equally depraved agents of the law, deserve this common denominator of respect. Even if we concede that white South Africans may have forfeited their right to be respected as human beings because of their consistently inhumane denial of that very right to their fellow-countrymen, there remain criminals such as Adonis, Willieboy, Roman, Butcherboy, and in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, the stooges and lumpenproletariat of which Bennett may serve as example. So lest thugs, parasites and reactionaries be granted the same value as fighters for freedom (George Adams, Tekwane, Beukes), human dignity must be reserved for those who have managed to resist being determined and demoralized by their environment -- a view which is indubitably offered by *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*. In which case, what claim upon our moral sympathies can the vast majority of suffering (and, as La Guma presents them, depraved and degenerate) South Africans make? Surely, simply the fact that they are victims, lambs to the slaughter: we are asked to regard human beings in the same sentimental way as George Adams, when, in the best tradition of the S.P.C.A., he takes the side of the mice in the

cat-and-mouse game of life. Now there is nothing wrong with sentimentality in its proper place, but one wonders whether it is an adequate and appropriate response to a tragic real-life situation. For it is an easy response, too easy. To vulgarize by overstatement, it is quite possible to love dogs and dislike men: to side with the victim simply because he is a victim allows us to make a perfectly painless decision, resulting in a cost-free moral superiority which suffices for the world of the fairy tale, the romance, the moral fable, but which will not stand up before the hard realities of South Africa today.

In his brilliant study of the use of violence in the arts -- a work on which I shall rely heavily in the following discussion -- John Fraser describes the impact on the viewer of Franju's film *Le Sang Des Bêtes*. I apologise for the length of the quotation, but Fraser's analysis effectively isolates the cardinal quality required of a successful work of protest art.

> As one watches that movie for the first time, one is liable to feel an appalled and steadily intensifying sympathy for the butchered animals, and to accompany this with a progressive dehumanizing of the slaughterers: a period photograph of one of them evokes patronizing laughter, the news that another of them lost a leg through wielding his skinning-knife carelessly is liable to provoke the reaction, 'Serve the brute right!' And then a casual and unironical reference is made in the commentary to 'this difficult and dangerous métier', and one realizes what one has been up to. There is a common tendency to turn off one's imagination at certain points and refuse to contemplate the possibility of having to do certain things and cope with the attendant moral problems. The things simply get done by the social machine, and one can keep one's clear conscience and one's moral imagination unsullied. But Franju's slaughterers, and others like them elsewhere, *are* taking risks, and they are taking them on our behalf because most of us enjoy eating meat and would be too squeamish or incompetent to do the butchering ourselves. And among the merits of certain violent and irreversible situations is that they can bring one to a point beyond which certain

> options cannot continue to remain open and a choice must be made. Faced with Franju's brilliant movie, one may decide to stop eating meat, or one may conclude regretfully that, as Gabriel Vialle puts it, 'this nightmare...is nothing other than the objective vision of a daily reality, unavoidable, necessary, and vital...', but one cannot logically both feel superior to the slaughterers and go on enjoying roast lamb and *côte de veau*.[30]

The conative function of the protest work of literature can likewise only be fulfilled if the work brings the reader to "a point beyond which certain options cannot continue to remain open and a choice must be made." A choice, it may be added, which will result in appropriate action being taken; a choice which, for one of La Guma's overseas readers, may involve a decision to stop buying South African steel or drinking South African brandy, to join an anti-apartheid lobbying group or to donate towards some anti-apartheid fund.

But where *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* differs from *Le Sang des Bêtes* is that La Guma's presentation of the system in South Africa does not force a decision which closes off options: on the contrary, it does not permit any options at all from the outset. For in his portrayal of white South Africans, for instance, the equivalent of the slaughterers in Franju's movie, La Guma has refused to concede that their vision of reality does correspond to certain actualities. He invites the reader to assume that white South Africans -- usually represented by the police -- are in the wrong simply because they are white South Africans: building on a prejudice which the reader in all probability brings to the work, he encourages the reader to "turn off [his] imagination at certain points and refuse to

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30 Fraser, p.139-140.

contemplate the possibility of having to do certain things and cope with the attendant moral problems ". In other words, by relying on the *frisson* of hatred and fear which the image of "sirens, knuckles, boots" is intended to produce, La Guma limits the reader's grasp of the subject to the sensational and emotional level. And by so doing, as we noted earlier in discussing his sentimental presentation of "victims", he allows the reader to adopt a facile (and therefore fragile) moral standpoint. Writing in an analogous context, Helmut Krausnick amplifies this point:

> Since Hitler's dictatorship is so obviously to be condemned from all points of view, people are tempted to think too little about it. That is why, although we possess an immense mass of literature about the Third Reich, so little intelligent use has been made of it. The superficiality of many works on the subject is no more than a reflection of the popular tendency; people prefer vivid writing (and it is difficult not to write vividly about Aushwitz); people try to evade the rationalism of the historian and prefer moralistic emotional theorizing. The current phrase [in 1965] is 'conscience awakening'. But a sleepy conscience is like a sleepy man: if a man is shaken hard enough he will wake up -- and then after one or two half-waking moments will quickly go to sleep again. *That which man's intellect once grasps however will remain and will not disappear.* [31]

And so Fraser argues that for protest art to be truly effective,

> ...what is under attack must be grasped as firmly and solidly as possible, which in turn means that it must have been observed precisely and in some real measure understood from the inside. Caricature and grotesquerie may serve in a rough fashion in the task of identifying and desanctifying enemies, but their effect is all too likely to wear off with the passing of time. [32]

Using this argument as a framework, we will now turn once more toward *In the Fog of the Seasons' End.*

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[31] Helmut Krausnick and others, Anatomy of the S.S. State, trans. Richard Barry, Marian Jackson, Dorothy Long (London: Collins, 1968) p.XV quoted by Frazer in Violence in the Arts, p.94.

[32] Fraser, *Violence in the Arts*, p.136-7.

The Prologue in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* anticipates the period between Elias Tekwane's first night in custody (Ch.15) and his death (Ch.17). For the purpose of this discussion, no principle of priority or integrity is violated by isolating the Prologue from its chronological context, because no significantly revealing insight into the characters concerned is to be gathered in the intervening pages. La Guma's manipulation of temporal sequence is a fimiliar device (c.f. *The Stone Country*), and the sensationalism of this Prologue successfully fulfils the rudimentary function of arresting the reader's attention and creating suspense. Elias Tekwane is conveyed to police headquarters in the early hours of the morning, amid ominous indications that he is leaving behind the daylight world of normality with all its customary safeguards and securities.[33] As one of the detectives reminds the reader, Tekwane must abandon all hope of protection under the law:

> 'No more lawyers. Those times are past. We don't give a bogger for them. We even keep the magistrates away now.' (p.2)

The prisoner begins to realise that "behind the ugly mask of the regime was an even uglier face which he had not yet looked on" (p.3), and the reader prepares for an inevitable collision between the law, which now exists only in terms of the unrestricted actions of those who administer it, and one who has dared to challenge its authority. Tekwane has been

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[33] At least, we are entitled to assume that it is Tekwane, although the central figure in the Prologue is referred to throughout as "the prisoner". La Guma's intention here, analogous to his use of typical figures (the Child, the Washerwoman, the Bicycle Messenger, etc.) in the recreation of the Sharpville massacre in Chapter 9, appears to consist in employing anonymity as a signal of the typical or average. The implication is that the prisoner's identity is irrelevant: the reader is witnessing *the* South African experience.

"anticipating a test of endurance for a long time" and is prepared for "another dimension of terror" (p.3). Now while the nebulosity of his apprehension as La Guma presents it is not in itself suspect, what does seem dubious is the composure with which Tekwane squares up for the doomed, unequal contest which must perforce ensue. After the vicious threats and preliminary violences of the detectives who arrest him ("'We'll make you shit'", etc.), it is no exaggeration to say that the prisoner's fear is not even commensurate with the forbodings of the reader whose immunity from sharing a similar experience is probably absolute. Tekwane, indeed, turns out to be a very brave man, but we cannot avoid feeling that his stoic fortitude does not move us as much as it ought to. For implicit in our recognition of true courage is surely a measuring of the performance of the protagonist against an intuitive estimation of how we ourselves would behave in a similar situation. Such a recognition therefore in general presupposes that the protagonist feels the mental and physical direness of his predicament just as keenly as we would in his position. This much is obvious: we do not ordinarily salute the "courage" of a madman, an imbecile, or any being incapable of feeling pain or fear.

Conversely, the primary fact about torture or any violence or cruelty, is that it hurts, and can hurt unbearably, and that we would not wish it inflicted upon ourselves. So if the portrayal of any violent or extreme situation in a protest work is to be at all effective (and so often just such a situation is the occasion of the protest), a minimum precondition is surely that it carries us out into the real world; or rather, that we are compelled to apperceive the situation by bringing to bear our own knowledge of pain and fear in empathetic identification with the victim. The probability that we already possess a sound general notion that the

presented world accurately recreates certain real-world states of affairs, is simply not sufficient. Fraser comments that in any artistic treatment of violence,

> ...behind the scenes a good deal of intense feeling must be presumed to be going on that underlines not [the victim's] differences from the reader but his kinship. And accordingly a novelist... offering to deal in violences has to work unusually hard at achieving immediacy of response.[34]

La Guma fails to exploit, through the consciousness of Tekwane, the full potential for shock or horror or fear which is promised by the bare facts of his narrative, largely because he takes the reader's response too much for granted. Especially after all the dreadful affronts to civilised values of the last few decades, which the efficiency of mass communication has made all too accessible to each of us, it is impossible for a novelist to make pat assumptions concerning either the susceptibility or the willingness of his reader to engage in the honest contemplation of the painful. He cannot rely upon the liveliness of some already existent moral sentiment for that, shall we call it, wrenching of the soul, which our conscience knows to be the only response to human suffering adequate and equal to the full stature of our own humanity. He cannot, simply because our threshold of shock is too high to be breached by the mere documentation of violence and inhumanity, however appalling or disgusting. More than ever before the artist who would treat of such things must meet the massive challenge of creating something more immediate, more real then the merely real.

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[34] Frazer, *Violence in the Arts*, p.56.

The protest writer has to beware of complacency in this regard. The documentary premise of his work, coupled with what he deems (usually quite correctly) to be the unquestionable validity of his moral position, may easily cloud over the importance of certain artistic exigencies. It is an artistic failure -- ultimately a failure of the imagination -- that Tekwane's ordeal does not move us as much as it should; that his behaviour is *fait accompli*, a pre-given imposed upon rather than emerging from the clash of imaginary circumstances and personalities.

To formulate this criticism in terms of the response expected of a typical, "ideal" reader is not to assume that the average human being stumbles along in a state of swinish apathy from which he must be goaded into sentience. If we accept that an inexperienced or naive reader may be profoundly troubled by a great deal of what is depicted in the novel, we may conclude that what *is* assumed is a peculiarly literary sophistication, a receptivity to the signals of specifically literary conventions. All that this sophistication may involve is a moderate degree of familiarity with the conventions of a couple of fictional sub-genres -- the spy story, the detective story, the 'orthodox' western, etc., in which failure of empathy is almost a precondition. We don't care how horrible a death awaits the enemy agent (Russian accent, grey trenchcoat, humourless fanaticism), not because we are indifferent to suffering, but because we have received authorial assurances that first, this is a "spy story", and second, that the character concerned is one of "them", and "they" are different from "us". The first involves the (probably only half-conscious) realisation that what we are reading -- characters, action, setting -- is so far removed from our own experience of life that we are entitled to react with the same blasé detachment that children instinctively adopt towards the brutalities of a Punch and Judy show. And the second, by locating us in a

moral landscape whose contours are absolutely unmistakeable, projects a thorough dehumanization of the antagonist. Now there is a danger that, in his anxiety to capture the full sympathy of the reader, the protest writer may resort to this kind of over-simplification. Consider La Guma's description of the officer in charge of Tekwane's interrogation:

> He was broad and seemed to be constructed of a series of pink ovals: balding head and fat oval face, fat neck that topped curving shoulders which formed the upper curve of the big oval that was his trunk: he could have been an advertisement for good cheer. He was in shirtsleeves, and the hands which emerged from the starched cuffs were pink and plump and oval. Only his eyes were small and round and shiny, like two glass beads;.... (p.3)

This is pure caricature. What is disconcerting is not so much the description itself -- although the Major becomes as gross and unlikely a figure as any of James Bond's whimsical adversaries -- as that La Guma has seen fit to indulge in some rather facile and irrelevant satire. If the only trouble with South Africa were that the whites looked ridiculous, then La Guma would not be living in exile in Britain.[35] We recall Fraser's remark that for protest art to be truly efficacious, "what is under attack must be grasped as firmly and solidly as possible, which in turn means that it must have been observed precisely and in some real measure understood from the inside". La Guma's willingness to understand stops short at the figure of the Major; still less does he attempt to enable the reader to understand. Now it is essential for a thorough 'intellectual' grasp of

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[35] It is worth noting that all the whites we meet in the pages of La Guma are endowed with "pink" complexions. To anyone familiar with the limited spectrum of beiges and tans which accounts for the vast majority of so-called white South Africans, this may seem odd. It appears that La Guma is using "pinkness" as a term of abuse equivalent to "inhuman", to accentuate the gap between whites and blacks, the oppressors and the victims.

what is under attack that we understand and empathise not only with the victim but also with the perpetrator of the violence or injustice. For just as we are only genuinely and lastingly outraged if we are ourselves made to feel vulnerable through an imaginative identification with the victim; so also, in order to be alerted to the existence of possibilities for violence and evil in ourselves, we must be able to identify to some degree with the violator. Often all that is entailed here is that the character concerned be presented as in certain respects normally rational and sentiment. Elias Tekwane has been involved in activities aimed at the violent overthrow of the State, but the State has proved too strong for him. It is highly unlikely that one in the inner powerhouse of the bureaucratic machine which has broken his operation and effected his capture will be a crass simpleton, nor yet a total cynic or deluded psychopath. The Major is much more likely to be a coherent personality acting intelligently, autonomously and in good faith, according to a value system which appears to him as rational and cohesive as Tekwane's does to him. One would be foolish not to acknowledge, however distasteful the admission, that the South African government's vision of reality does correspond to certain actualities. To dehumanize one's enemy is to underestimate him, and this is what renders the parody of patronization which La Guma puts into the mouth of the Major so irresponsible and meretricious:

> ...'I have heard that some of your young people even want to learn mathematics. What good is mathematics to you ? You see, you people are not the same as we are. We can understand these things, mathematics,...', etc. (p.4)

The point is that a situation which La Guma -- by drawing on all the cliches of the popular conception of the police state, and especially that

of the South African regime as a preposterous and obscene joke -- offers as typical, in fact does not epitomise but lies well to one side of actualities; more significantly, that the careful reader is conscious, however inchoately, of this distortion. And this consciousness is confirmed by Tekwane's response to his predicament. The passionate rhetoric of his reply to the Major's cajolery would be appropriate on the political podium but seems incongruous in the mouth of a man who knows he forfeits his life in its utterance:

> 'You want me to co-operate. You have shot my people when they have protested against unjust treatment; you have torn people from their homes, imprisoned them, not for stealing or murder, but for not having your permission to live. Our children live in rags and die of hunger. And you want me to co-operate with you? It is impossible.' (p.5)

When La Guma finally tunes us in to the prisoner's inner feelings, the effect is unmistakeably bogus:

> He felt harrassed, lonely, hunted, but he carried with him a sense of great injustice and a desperate pride...
>
> He was afraid, but clung to his pride and the sense of injustice. (p.6)

La Guma is telling us how Tekwane feels (or ought to feel), not showing us. The invocation of "pride" and "injustice" is pure authorial contrivance at this point -- we cannot believe that the prisoner's thoughts actually coalesce around these particular words. Admittedly, La Guma is not reporting interior monologue; but perhaps he ought to be, for it is vital at this juncture that the reader empathize as fully as possible with the courageous

hero.[36] Above all what is missing here is a sense of the physical realities of the here-and-now not only in Tekwane's moral consciousness but also in the whole tissue of sensitivities which constitutes his bodily existence. A comparison between La Guma's treatment of Tekwane's final hours and the interrogation and death of Bekimpi in D.M. Zwelonke's *Robben Island* may help to elucidate this point.[37]

Both prisoners are amused by the initial soft-sell attempts of the political police (*Seasons' End* p.4, *Robben Island* p.80), but Bekimpi has an altogether more formidible opponent in Colonel Van der Merwe. Zwelonke's Colonel -- courteous, confidential, quietly-spoken -- is careful not to insult the intelligence of his prisoner and we readily sympathize with Bekimpi's momentary confusion.

When the time comes for the rough stuff to begin, Tekwane is returned to his cell and beaten up. These are a few samples of La Guma's handling of the scene:

> He was experiencing an awful sensation of asphyxiation and horrifying doom...
>
> The [detective] began to batter him mercilessly with his fists. It was like working at a bag in a gymnasium. When one was tired, the other took over. The prisoner fought for breath and struggled to avoid the blows...
>
> Strength drained from his body like water from a burst bottle...
>
> Pain sprang through his legs with the stab of skinning knives... (p.7)

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[36] There is no technical reason why there should not be a direct rendering of consciousness. Indeed, the second of the two sentences quoted is followed by a reported thought: "That's the last speech I'll make, he thought; the last." (6).

[37] D.M. Zwelonke, *Robben Island* (London: Heinemann Educational Books), 1973.

And when the thread of narrative is picked up again in Chapter 17 we find:

> Pain was like the devil which had usurped his body...
>
> His whole body was held together on a framework of pain... (p.169)
>
> Talk, talk, talk, his mind told him while his body jerked and jigged like a broken puppet on badly manipulated strings... (p.173)

What is open to question here is the immediacy of the effect which La Guma achieves. Are we really alerted to the agony of Tekwane's ordeal? Or are we protected by authorial mediation, kept at a safe distance by La Guma's undemanding similes, insulated from naked shock by the verbal contrivance of an authorial observer who has diluted its impact to the conventionally palatable? Certainly, we are totally incapable of empathizing with the policemen who batter away at the unyielding matyr. The gulf between "them" and "us" seems unbridgeable.

A few extracts from Zwelonke's treatment of a similar situation reveal an important difference.[38] Bekimpi is suspended by his feet, naked from the ceiling:

> The inspector walked nearer and nudged his prisoner's head with one knee. 'I say, are you still being a bloody big fool?' He playfully slapped Bekimpi's sagging buttocks....Bekimpi tried to follow the eyes of the inspector, but he couldn't. All he could see properly was the roof and the thin rope which supported his body in extreme tension. His eyes were weary of rolling upwards to look at the floor. And his neck had strained to breaking point by bending backwards. The floor was two feet below his head.

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[38] A further interesting comparison might be made between the different kinds of hallucination from which the prisoners suffer in their last hours. Bekimpi's sexual fantasies and nightmarish recreations of the known world back on the mainland are more believable than La Guma's romanticization of Tekwane's reception by his ancestors. The actual death of Tekwane reads like something out of Rider Haggard.

> 'What do you want me to do?' cried Bekimpi in pain, a twitching backache cutting across his spinal chord. The inspector brushed the prisoner's shrunken stomach. The stomach had been off duty for three days and three nights. The bowels fell down into the chest. The lungs felt that weight and their own weight crushed on the throat. The wind-pipe was airlocked. Air struggled in and out in hard, panting respiration.
>
> That evening, Du Plessis and two others came to have fun with the hanging man. They let him swing like a hunk of meat in a butchery...One of them played with Bekempi's testicles. 'By God, this bastard has a big penis', he shouted merrily, 'Just like a donkey's.
>
> Another one slapped Bekimpi's buttocks. Then took a ball-point pen and pushed it slowly down the helpless man's anus. The muscles there shrank inward like a snail into its shell. Bekimpi moaned.
>
> 'Be careful', Du Plessis cautioned. A brown liquid oozed out and solidified into weak faeces. 'Be careful; the man hasn't been to the lav for three days, remember.' The one playing with the testicles squeezed harder. Bekimpi emitted a long, painful moan. Mucus and saliva came out of his nostrils and mouth and oiled the floor.
>
> The colonel came and stood at the door, an angry and frightened man. 'Do you want to kill this man? Then don't do it here. Take him to Cape Town.' (pp. 144-6)

The power of this writing owes to an immediacy which Zwelonke has achieved through an uncompromising precision of observation. But perhaps the most striking and appalling aspect of this scene is the shocking familiarity with which the police treat Bekimpi's body. In contrast with the routine insults of the Special Branch men in *Seasons' End* ("You baboon", "you bloody kaffir", etc.), there is something chillingly intimate -- and, it must be said, human -- about their attitude towards Bekimpi, especially as it is manifest in their almost child-like curiosity about his naked body. And it is just this recognition, however unwelcome, that the interrogators are not mindless destructive machines, that at least one of them is conscious and fearful of the implications of their actions; in short, that they are approximately as human as we are, which renders the scene so particularly

dreadful. More specifically, we realise that despite their attempt to dehumanize Bekimpi altogether, to reduce him to a ludicrous inverted object, they still retain a fascinated awareness -- indeed, it is almost a discovery -- of his humanity. And it is just this fact -- that, given this awareness, creatures readily intelligible as human beings can still behave in such a revolting way -- which produces the genuine shock, the shock that concertinas aesthetic distance and probes into the recesses of our consciences; that forces the kind of meaningful decision of which Fraser speaks.

It may be useful to anticipate the objection that the evidence adduced in the above discussion is too selective to produce any critical insights valid for La Guma's work as a whole. The sample chosen for analysis is not a random one; however, the fundamental authorial attitudes and techniques of characterization in evidence there are truly representative of La Guma's entire corpus. Because the Prologue to *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* deals with physical violence, which is the cutting edge of apartheid, and because the depiction of physical violence makes certain unusual demands of both author and reader, these attitudes and techniques are put to a crucial test. A further objection may be phrased thus: to investigate the description of human suffering in so clinical and detached a manner, and in the knowledge that it is not purely im aginary, bespeaks a callousness and lack of concern for the very issues which the South African protest writer burns to redress. On the contrary, what La Guma's writing lacks is neither congruence with my political persuasions -- an irrelevant consideration, in any case -- nor sufficient of the ingredients to satisfy a stultified tradition of literary criticism. I have attempted to show that the value of La Guma's work *as protest literature*, i.e. with due regard for its conative function, is increasingly vitiated by political and

ideological overkill; that "it has become increasingly difficult for La Guma to allow to the fictional material itself the responsibility of political statement ", and that in his most recent work, "the problem has become acute." [39]

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[39] Rabkin, "Alex La Guma and Reality in South Africa," p.60.

CONCLUSION

A Dialogue in which the Issues are Made Plain

Men have made great claims on literature's behalf, as well you know, and perhaps you may have heard of Solzhenitzyn's affirmation that "the convincingness of a true work of art is completely irrefutable, and it forces even an opposing heart to surrender".[1]

No, I had not, but the sentiment is hardly new. If we did not share Solzhenitzyn's faith, then few of us would write at all. And yet there is one thing that bothers me. Most "true art" is liberal and humanistic, and thus a force for good. And yet the world today remains -- how shall I say -- a mess. Take South Africa: if these "opposing hearts" were really putty in the artist's hands, then perhaps we might expect a different kind of deal by now.

Agreed. Perhaps Solzhenitzyn is exaggerating for effect -- as these writer-types are known to do -- or perhaps your interpretation is too literal. For that is not the way art works. Some poems have done their best to imitate a bullet, but of course without success. They only compromise themselves as poems . . . but more of that anon. I am reminded

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[1] Alexander Solzhenitzyn, Nobel Lecture in Literature, quoted in T.T. Moyana, "Problems of a creative writer in South Africa," *Aspects of South African Literature* (op. cit.), p.91.

of Coleridge's comment on the character of poetry: it issues, he said in "the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities". Think of what importance is attached to ambiguity, to paradox and irony. The effect of the aesthetic is the simultaneous satisfaction, we might say, of contradictory impulses -- which brings about a state of psychic equilibrium, while inhibiting the tendency to act. René Wellek sums it up so well: "We reject as poetry or label as mere rhetoric everything that persuades us to a definite outward action .... Art imposes some kind of framework which takes the statement out of the world of reality".[2]

But there are some writers who in their work attempt precisely that: to persuade us to "a definite outward action".

Indeed. And it is just such writers who are the subject of the study we have read. The 'framing' effect of narrative art was here explained as structural duplicity, involving author, work and reader, which served to transpose the 'statement' of the work onto another plane -- a sort of as-if plane, or never-never land. The writer's use of language was not practical or transitive, but creative and intransitive; which is perhaps another way of saying that a poem must not mean, but simply be. Thus by contrast were the contradictions of the protest writer's work laid bare, for he is bent upon the changing of reality, and not its re-creation.

Does this mean that the protest work is necessarily bad art?

Well, in a sense it does, for as we have defined it, the aesthetic of the protest work tends to subserve its conscientizing purpose. The premise of the protest work reveals itself as mixed: the book must be a call to arms as well as work of art. A work of art is self-contained,

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[2] *Theory of Literature*, pp.24-25.

coherent in itself; a call to arms is incomplete until it has been heeded. Virginia Wolf complained of Wells' and Bennett's books that reading them was not enough, they somehow begged for more. The reader felt obliged to write a cheque before his duty was discharged. This is exactly the demand the protest work purports to make. Its function is poetic and conative; applause it wants, but action too. And it is notoriously difficult to do or be two things at once. Ezekiel Mphahlele has described the problem of the committed writer thus:

> There will always be stubborn and insoluble tensions between the works of the imagination and the social forces and imperatives it 'criticizes' -- more stubborn than we are often prepared to admit; almost as if social reality and the imagination were rejecting each other, like mother and child. [3]

Yet he does hold out some hope for reconciliation:

> In situations of social upheaval, you have to decide where the priorities lie, which of the two sets of demands you should fulfil: the urge to play with images and symbols (which is what imaginative writing is) and the inescapable commitment to your colour or race or party which calls upon you to act. If you want a synthesis between the two, you still have to sweat it out deep down there in the workshop cellar of your being.[4]

Many writers have sweated, yet few have worked it out. We might say that art and action just don't mix, unless a genius does the stirring. If I may quote again a statement we discussed in Chapter One: "If message becomes more important than method, literary art suffers."

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[3] *The African Image*, p.10.

[4] ibid., p.73.

But isn't that quite obvious, especially, as was shown in Chapter One, when we realize that the statement is a tautology? It seems to me an awful lot of argument and lots of polysyllables have been expended to enable us to reach a conclusion that any one of Virginia Woolf's Common Readers could have told us on the spot.

Perhaps you are right. But what justifies this study is that throughout we have been fair to the intentions of the protest writer and the nature of his work. We have assiduously tried to be objective and 'descriptive'; to accept no points of view untested or untried. Thus La Guma's work is scrutinized in terms of what it tries to do, and not what custom says it ought.

Well, what about La Guma? I must confess I'm not entirely sure of what conclusions we have reached.

In the novels of La Guma, the problem of the writer's loyalty -- as adumbrated by Mphahlele -- is compounded by the intervention of an ideology, a kind of grid between imagination and reality. This ideology pre-structures the reality which informs the structure of the work. And this presents artistic problems.

But why should this be? Surely every literary work projects some ideology.

Look at it this way. The principles of selection and arrangement which La Guma brings to bear on his material are pre-determined by an ideology independent of that material: they do not emerge from the interplay of his imagination and reality. Each novel by La Guma presents an artistic re-creation of reality which is also perforce ideological and therefore apriori: its working out in the structure of the work is in a

strict sense tautological. Now the problem is that this priority conflicts with the epistemological premises of the mimetic mode in which La Guma is working, (what Ian Watt calls "formal realism"). According to these premises, the novel reveals its men in action in a manner which corresponds to our own habits of perception. This is the crux of the novel's claim to verisimilitude, which is in the end the only universal standard by which all 'realistic' forms may be assessed. Take La Guma's characters. They simply do not have antonomy, or that illusion of autonomy which enables us to act. We may well be simply products of our age, defined by economic forces. But that is not the way we see it from the inside. We feel there is much more to life than that contained within this formula. La Guma's prejudiced perception cuts down the individual to a size which suits the politician or the sociologist, but does not suit the novel. We might say that it clashes with the existential epistemological postulates of formal realism; a clash reflected, in Elder Olson's terms, in a constant tension between didactic and mimetic impulses in the structure of plot.

You have anticipated a point which I thought to make, that to condemn La Guma's characterization is to disagree with his beliefs. I accept that he is judged by the immanent laws of the form in which you say he works. But perhaps this form is something other than a realistic mode. 'Socialist realism' is tendentious of its essence, even, as Gorky held, a misnomer for "revolutionary romanticism".

If La Guma was not writing in a realistic mode, then how would you account for his devotion to the concrete, all the careful heed of sights and smells and texture? Besides, the conscientizing purpose of

his work dictates that he must give the 'facts'. And this suggests a signal contradiction which seems to undermine the rationale behind this conscientizing function. La Guma's is a revolutionary literature whose orientation renders it remedial or revisionary. He has no mass audience at home and writes for those abroad. He asks for action, and yet outside pressure on the Government is extended in the hope of easing conditions in the country, which will thus decrease the chance of revolution. In fact the function of his work at times seems not so much to protest as to show how Marxist theory deals with the phenomenon of apartheid. But I am straying from the point I wished to make, which was that La Guma's works fail as protest for the same reason that they, on the whole, fail artistically.

Does this not imply that the best works of art are also the most effective protest?

Well, lets get down to basics. How does it happen that we are deeply moved by what we read in books?

It must be that we share the moods and fortunes of the characters portrayed.

Quite. We say that we identify with them, imagining ourselves in their position. Now what determines the degree of this identification?

I think it would depend upon the kind of book. In crime novels or Westerns, where the action is what counts, we do not really need to empathize, or only distantly. We take the hero's side without a sense of deep commitment. But books that we take seriously -- true works of art -- are somewhat more demanding of our sympathies.

And how do they succeed in capturing these sympathies?

By convincing us that what we read is truthful, true-to-life, for us and for all men.

Exactly. We speak of "universality" -- a term whose currency tends to be devalued nowadays -- which simply means that we can recognise ourselves (not literally, of course) in how the characters behave. Now are the protest writer's aims, in these terms, so eccentric after all?

No, for what the protest writer wants is all our sympathy.

Indeed he does, and more. For his work to be effective, it must be so convincing that it predicates some action, that it forces us to accommodate whatever it portrays within the logic of our waking lives. And we will only be convinced, we will only be won over, if we capitulate in head as well as heart. We must believe we have been shown the whole truth of the situation, not just part. Perhaps we may yet save Solzhenitzyn's declaration that "the convincingness of a true work of art is irrefutable". Most 'true works of art' are singularly free of propaganda, which is not to say that they do not take sides in social issues. But a necessary pre-condition is that the author seem impartial, that he be content to show, and let the judgements come of their own accord. A lesser writer lacks the skill to imaginatively transmute his feelings and beliefs. He tells us what he thinks: we recognize its bias, and the 'truth' the novel has to offer will only leave a lasting mark on those hearts already won, and leave opposing hearts unscathed. George Eliot has expressed it thus:

> The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies. Appeals founded on generalizations and statistics require a sympathy ready-made, a moral

> sentiment already in activity; but a picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment.[5]

Perhaps, if I may interject, the novel is not the best vehicle for social protest anyway?

This, indeed, is the view of Professor A.J. Gurr, who points out that while "moral sentiment is the ultimate goal of the artist", "the specific task is the extension of our sympathies". He goes on to argue that the novels of great artists such as George Eliot and Tolstoy "enlarge our understanding but do not help us to change the world, as [Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach] would have us do".[6]

This strikes me as a kind of anti-conclusion.

Again you're right. Who can dictate to writers what to write? The outlaw-writer's greatest asset is his lawlessness, which he surrenders when his work is made to serve the needs of others; and then,

> ...if his only poetry is
> a bitter comb of dark honey,
> it is not because he wished it so
> or expected better, but because.[7]

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[5] Quoted by A.J. Gurr, "Third-World Novels: Naipaul and After" p.6.

[6] ibid., pp. 6,9.

[7] From "The Poet in Time of Civil War" by Christopher Mann, forthcoming in *Contrast*.

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