ABSTRACT

Towards an Appreciation of the Woman Character in Alex La Guma’s Fiction

By
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This paper examines the virtual absence of criticism on the woman character who is a main feature in the fiction of the South African writer, Alex La Guma, who at one time was the Secretary-General of the Afro-Asian Writers’ Association. He had been a long-standing opponent and, therefore, victim of the apartheid regime in South Africa, which, as a result, had banned his works. The stature of La Guma as a South African (and indeed an African) writer is indisputable. The woman character appears in twenty of his twenty-two works of fiction. Despite her significant presence in these works, she has received scanty attention from literary critics in an age when gender paradigms in literary scholarship have come in vogue all over the world—as is discernible in even works on South African literature that pay tribute to not only the woman writer but also the woman character. On the whole however La Guma’s woman character hardly appears as a central feature in the criticism of his fiction despite her prevalence in his works. His woman character lives in a fictional world where injustice reigns and the categories of the roles she plays are not fortuitous but arise from literary characters as personal and social individuals created using realism as reflections of the material world. To this end, on the personal level, her three primary roles are maternal, romantic, and marital as she is depicted as a biological or surrogate mother, a lover or a spouse; on the social level, her two primary roles are occupational and political, as she has responsibilities and duties outside the home circle that comprise her social undertakings, economic activities, or political work. This study suggests critical tools that can be used in an evaluation that would yield the aesthetic ideal she embodies in both her depiction and her roles.

Key Words: Alex La Guma, fictional world, woman character, literary criticism, feminism, aesthetic ideal

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