"Considered as a Social Record": A Reassessment of *Cry, the Beloved Country*

Andrew Foley

I

As 1998 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*, it seems appropriate to offer a reassessment of the value and significance of the novel. In particular, it is worth considering how a book which has been the subject of so much adverse criticism over the years continues to exert such a powerful hold over its readership half a century after its first appearance. The novel has, after all, been condemned by a diversity of critics as paternalistic, naïve, simplistic and irrelevant, and its author labelled misguided, conservative and anachronistic. Indeed, Paton's work has been ill served even by sympathetic commentators who have tended to highlight and laud the novel's simplicity, spirituality and universality, and so have downplayed or ignored what constitutes a vital part of its meaning, its depiction and analysis of South African social and political conditions on the eve of the advent of apartheid. This article, therefore, intends to argue that *Cry, the Beloved Country*, far from being inaccurate or reductive in its social analysis, in fact provides a keen insight into the problems facing South African society at the time, an informed and subtle understanding of contemporaneous socio-political debates, and a sensitive appraisal of the possibilities for the country's restoration on a number of different levels.

This is not to suggest, of course, that *Cry, the Beloved Country* is little more than a sociological tract, or to undervalue the fictional story at the centre of the book. A key element in the novel's achievement lies in its moving and evocative presentation of the struggle of the two main protagonists, Stephen Kumalo and James Jarvis, towards mutual understanding and reconciliation in the twilight of their years. But it appears that very often this aspect of the work has been emphasised to the virtually total neglect of its socio-political dimension. Significantly, one of the novel's earliest commentators, Max Perkins, editor for Charles Scribner's...
Sons (the first publishers of the work), felt that that the final segment of the book, dealing with the amelioration of socio-economic conditions in the tribal reserves, was anti-climactic and should be revised (see Callan 1991, 16). And almost fifty years later, Darryl Roodt’s film version (1995) of the book concentrated almost entirely on the basic story line, and quite ignored the question of social restoration which the novel explores. In order to redress the critical balance, as it were, and to meet some of the charges leveled against the novel, this article will focus in some detail upon the social and political aspects of the work. At the same time, however, as will become clear, the sociological features of the novel are not really separable from those dealing with individual characters, for in Paton’s view it is the human individual who constitutes the primary unit of social or political value. This view represents the core principle of liberalism as a political philosophy, which may be seen to underpin the fundamental meaning of the novel as a whole. As such, this article will attempt to read Cry, the Beloved Country on its own ideological terms of reference as a novel offering a consciously liberal perspective on South African social problems and seeking liberal solutions to those problems.

Following the structure of Cry, the Beloved Country itself, the article will divide into two main sections. The first will deal with Paton’s depiction of the difficulties confronting South African society at the time, and will examine Paton’s credentials as a social commentator. The second section will turn to Paton’s exploration of the possibilities for restoration, and will evaluate the plausibility of his social diagnosis. Finally, the article will consider the continuing relevance of Cry, the Beloved Country in the South Africa of the 1990s.

II

In evaluating the quality of Paton’s thought as a social commentator, it is important to note that he was not always a proponent of liberal values. He was not born into a liberal-minded family, nor did he display particularly liberal attitudes in the early part of his life. Although he was clearly a decent, moral young man, concerned about his neighbour, and eager to serve his community, he could not be termed a liberal because he had not yet comprehended the importance of what he later identified as the defining characteristic of liberalism in South Africa, “its particular concern with racial justice” (Paton 1958, 6). Indeed, in his autobiographical essay, “Case History of a Pinky” (1971; in Paton 1975, 235-236), Paton relates his experience directly to that of Arthur Jarvis in Cry, the Beloved Country (reported in Arthur’s “Private Essay on the Evolution of a South African”),
in claiming that he was brought up by "honourable parents" and taught all he should know about "honour and charity and generosity," and yet of other ethnic groups in South Africa, he "learnt nothing at all" (Paton 1988a, 150).

The seminal event which served to precipitate the start of Paton's "learning" about South Africa was his decision at the age of thirty-two — following a life-threatening bout of enteric fever — to take up the post of Principal at Diepkloof Reformatory for African Boys. Speaking of himself in the third person in "Case History of a Pinky" (Paton 1971; in Paton 1975, 238-239), he comments:

It opened his eyes. For the first time in his life . . . he saw South Africa as it was . . . . During those years at Diepkloof Reformatory he began to understand the kind of world in which Black people had to live and struggle and die. I won't say that he overcame all racial fear, but I will say that he overcame all racial hatred and prejudice.

Two further crucial events in Paton's life brought him to full liberal consciousness. Firstly, he served on the Anglican Diocesan Commission of 1941 under the chairmanship of Geoffrey Clayton, then Bishop of Johannesburg, which had the task of attempting to define "what it believed to be the mind of Christ for South Africa" (1973a, 116). Paton (1973a, 117) has recounted that his involvement in the Commission was for him like coming from the darkness into the light as he began to understand at last that one could not be a Christian in South Africa and claim to love justice and truth without becoming actively concerned about the socio-political problems of the country. As he trenchantly remarks in Towards the Mountain (1980, 248), "the bishop's commission . . . didn't change the heart of the nation but it changed me." Secondly, there was Paton's virtually epiphanic encounter at the funeral of Edith Rheinallt-Jones, recalled in his essay, "A Deep Experience" (1961). While Paton had been impressed with Edith's work at the South African Institute of Race Relations and the Wayfarers, as well as with her relationships with blacks, whom she treated as absolute equals, his real revelation came at her funeral in 1944 at St George's Presbyterian Church in Johannesburg (1961, 24): scores of people of every colour and creed "had come to honour her memory — their hates and their fears, their prides and their prejudices, all for the moment forgotten." For Paton the experience was profoundly significant:

In that church one was able to see, beyond any possibility of doubt, that what this woman had striven for was the highest and best kind of thing to strive for in a country like South Africa. I knew then I would never again be able to think in terms of race and nationality. I was no longer a white person but a member of the human race.
I came to this, as a result of many experiences, but this one... was the deepest of them all.

By the mid-1940s, then, Paton had come to understand and accept the basic precepts of liberalism. Far from merely representing the adoption of conventional or convenient views, Paton's social and political understanding had developed through hard personal sacrifice and experience, and through a gradual, uneven intellectual evolution. Thus, in writing *Cry, the Beloved Country* in 1946, Paton came to the task not as an uninformed neophyte but as a middle-aged professional man with a mature apprehension of racial and political issues in South Africa.

As has been well documented (Paton 1980; Alexander 1994), Paton began writing *Cry, the Beloved Country* in an unpremeditated manner under the inspiration of homesickness during a lengthy tour of overseas penal institutions. Nevertheless, the novel is fundamentally the product of Paton's urgent need to utter, as he put it (1980, 272), "a cry of protest against the injustices of my own country." It was, indeed, part of Paton's express intention, in writing the novel, to "stab South Africa in the conscience" (in Callan 1982,29), and to effect this he set out to portray the country's social ills with uncompromising candour. Thus, in the "Author's Note" that precedes the novel (and from which this article derives its title), Paton observes that his book is a work of fiction rather than fact in its primary aspects, but he goes on to stress that in terms of its social analysis of South Africa it is both valid and accurate: "In these aspects therefore the story is not true, but considered as a social record it is the plain and simple truth."

Such a claim is of course rhetorically exaggerated, but Paton's basic point is that the novel's depiction of South Africa's social problems derives neither from sensationalistic embellishment nor from mere conjecture, but is based upon the actual conditions obtaining in the country at the time. It is a point which is directed specifically at those South Africans who would simply not accept the authenticity of the scenes of black deprivation and suffering presented in the novel: one recalls, for instance, Prime Minister D. F. Malan's wife, at the premiere of the 1949 film version of the book, refusing to believe that such township ghettos existed in Johannesburg (Paton 1988b, 53-54). Paton's point could also be turned against those critics who accuse him of socio-political ignorance or ingenuousness, for it must be remembered that Paton's situation and background had put him in a very advantageous position to write a novel of this kind. Most evidently, Paton's experiences, over ten years, as Principal of Diepkloof Reformatory had placed him personally and directly in touch with the effects of racial discrimination in South Africa, at the level both of the individual and of the
Furthermore, as a social analyst and commentator, he had over a long period of time wrestled with the question of the underlying causes of these effects, and had frequently presented statistical and other evidence before various public and private bodies (see Callan 1968, 52).

By way of example, shortly before the composition of *Cry, the Beloved Country*, Paton had published a series of articles in the journal, *The Forum*, and elsewhere during 1943-1945, which deal critically and objectively with many of the issues raised in the novel, especially that of the causes of crime and its elimination (see Paton 1943a-c; 1944a-c; 1945a-c). These pieces propounded the basic message, as one of their titles suggests, that the "real way to cure crime" was for society to "reform itself"; in particular, a society should provide its members with a sense that they were "socially significant" because "to mean something in the world is the deepest hunger of the human soul" (1944a, 24). Another article, entitled "Who is Really to Blame for the Crime Wave in South Africa?" (1945c, 7-8), is in fact obliquely referred to in *Cry, the Beloved Country* through the title of one of Arthur Jarvis's speeches (Paton 1988a, 72). In this article, Paton sets out to offer an explicitly liberal alternative to the prevailing official view, embodied, for instance, in the 1943 committee under S. H. Elliott, chief magistrate of Johannesburg, which with gross insensitivity recommended simplistically that the way to combat the increase in crime was merely through stricter enforcement of the pass laws (see Davenport 1987, 340).

Paton, in contrast, warns that the causes of the crime wave are to be found not simply in the fact of the rapid urbanisation of the post-war period — though this is certainly relevant. Rather, he asserts that the more important underlying cause is the alarming disintegration of traditional African society under pressure of the impact of Western social and economic forces. This decay in the moral and spiritual support structure of African society, both in the tribal reserves and in the cities, which had for some time been gradually worsening, had now reached crisis proportions and required urgent attention. Typically, though, Paton is not content to suggest a solution merely along abstract economic lines. Instead, he maintains (1945c, 8) that ultimately "moral and spiritual decay can be stopped only by moral and spiritual means," and that social regeneration can only occur if the conditions are created where morality and social responsibility can flourish: "men obey the laws when they are pursuing worthy goals, working for some good purpose, making the most of their seventy years, using their gifts." He makes the further telling point that the real reason why white society denies blacks opportunities to develop these gifts is out of blind, irrational "fear," a fear which obscures the causal connection between African social...
frustration and its criminal consequences (see also especially Paton 1943b, 1944a, 1945a).

Clearly, then, the details of the "social record" which emerge in Cry, the Beloved Country derive not from unsubstantiated imaginative fancy but from direct personal experience and authentic knowledge of social conditions. It is these details with which Paton confronts the reader in the first movement of the novel, through his presentation of the parallel experiences of Stephen Kumalo and James Jarvis as they are forced to recognise and to understand the nature and the full extent of their society's problems for the first time in their lives.

To begin with Stephen Kumalo, the initial circumstances which set off the dramatic conflict correspond closely to the situation described in Paton's Forum article discussed above (1945c). Kumalo, a humble village parson in Ndotsheni in rural Natal, is compelled into a journey to Johannesburg to try to find three missing members of his family and re-unite the family structure. The attempt ends in failure, however. His sister, Gertrude, has become a loose and dissolute woman, who, after briefly repenting, finally disappears. His brother, John, is a corrupt, self-serving politician, who wants nothing to do with Ndotsheni. And, worst of all, his son, Absalom, has become caught up in criminal activities and is, by the time Stephen finds him, the confessed murderer of Arthur Jarvis. Stephen's quest does, nevertheless, serve an important purpose in that it forces him into a greater understanding of himself and his society. He has simply never been fully confronted by the fundamental problems of his society at large and has no experience of how to deal with them. He now embarks not merely on a physical journey but also on a spiritual journey of discovery and learning. In an important sense, Paton positions his readers so that they share the journey and experience, with Kumalo, the often brutal nature of their own society, something of which they too may well have been ignorant.

In Johannesburg, then, Kumalo is brought face to face with the poverty and squalor of the townships; he is appalled by the descent into crime, wrongdoing and corruption of so many people, including his own relatives; he is confronted everywhere in the city by the fact of white oppression, racial inequality and injustice; and he is horrified by the infrastructural inadequacies of African life in the city as a whole. These realities are given immediate expression in the first of three choral chapters in the novel, where the voices of the townships clash and mingle to speak directly of the crushing misery and frustration suffered by thousands of black South Africans daily. This chapter (chapter 9) serves the purpose both of widening the perspective of the novel beyond that of Kumalo alone to include the
society in general, as well as of providing a form of external confirmation of Kumalo's alarmed personal response to what he sees.

What Kumalo comes fundamentally to understand is that the root cause of this degradation and corruption lies in the disintegration of traditional African society. Furthermore, Kumalo's failure to re-unite his family and restore the traditional kinship structure suggests, metonymically, the impossibility of restoring the former tribal system generally. It is Msimangu, Kumalo's physical and intellectual guide in Johannesburg, who makes the point explicitly and draws the relevant conclusion:

The tragedy is not that things are broken. The tragedy is that they are not mended again. The white man has broken the tribe. And it is my belief — and again I ask your pardon — that it cannot be mended again. But the house that is broken, and the man that falls apart when the house is broken, these are the tragic things. That is why the children break the law, and old white people are robbed and beaten. (25)

Kumalo does eventually accept the validity of Msimangu's assertion and he begins to recognise that this reality is as relevant to Africans living in the rural areas as it is to those in the cities, his words echoing the narratorial description of the rural waste scene of the opening pages of the novel:

The tribe was broken and would be mended no more. The tribe that had nurtured him, and his father and his father's father, was broken. For the men were away, and the young men and the girls were away, and the maize hardly reached to the height of a man. (79)

However, even in this moment of dark despair, there is already forming in his mind an incipient thought about the possibility of a way forward in restoration:

He turned with relief to the thought of rebuilding . . . . After seeing Johannesburg he would return with a deeper understanding to Ndotsheni . . . . One could go back knowing better the kind of thing that one must build. He would go back with a new and quickened interest in the school, not as a place where children learned to read and write and count only, but as a place where they must be prepared for life in any place to which they might go. Oh for education for his people, for schools up and down the land, where something might be built that would serve them when they went away to the towns, something that would take the place of the tribal law and custom. For a moment he was caught up in a vision . . . . (79)
Thus, already present at this point in the novel — barely a third of the way through — is the implicit faith in the potential for the regeneration of society. Indeed, it is part of the general ethos of the book that even though the world might seem to be pervaded by evil and destruction there still remain many sources of goodness and generosity, and so it is possible for there to be, at least potentially, in the words of the novel’s sub-title, “comfort in desolation.” Even in his bleakest moments, Kumalo is comforted and sustained by Msimangu and others, and finds succour in sources unimagined:

> Who indeed knows the secret of the earthly pilgrimage? Who indeed knows why there can be comfort in a world of desolation?  
> (56; see also 187 and 224)

The implication is that this principle applies with equal validity at the level of the social and political. So, in one sense, the novel records the extent of the problem:

> Cry for the broken tribe, for the law and the custom that is gone.  
> Aye, and cry aloud for the man who is dead. for the woman and children bereaved. Cry, the beloved country, these things are not yet at an end (66);

but it also suggests that there is enough humaneness and practical good-will in the world for the beloved country to be regenerated as a just and racially harmonious society. For example, although Kumalo is confronted continually by the injustice of a political system of white oppression, so too does he meet several instances of white men who have dedicated themselves to fighting that system and aiding the oppressed: the Afrikaner official at the Reformatory; Father Vincent at the mission; Mr Carmichael, the lawyer who takes Absalom’s case pro deo; the white motorists who help the bus boycotters; and, of course, Arthur Jarvis himself.

It is, in fact, clearly part of the novel’s main purpose to make plain that the large proportion of blame for the current disintegration of black society in South Africa is to be laid squarely at the door of the whites, and so it is in large measure their responsibility to make amends and help to construct a new, integrated and equitable social order. Msimangu, in affirming that the old tribal structure cannot be mended, makes this clear:

> It suited the white man to break the tribe, he continued gravely. But it has not suited him to build something in the place of what is broken. I have pondered this for many hours and must speak it, for it is the truth for me. They are not all so. There are some white men who give their lives to build up what is broken. But they are not
Msimangu’s speech raises two vital issues in the novel: the responsibility of whites to participate actively in the restoration of society; and the pervasive fear which militates against their doing so. If the chorus of African voices in chapter 9 serves to confirm the extensiveness of the frustration and hardship suffered by black South Africans, then the corresponding chorus of white voices in chapter 12 emphasises the ubiquitous fear and confusion in white society generally:

Have no doubt it is fear in the land. For what can men do when so many have grown lawless? Who can enjoy the lovely land, who can enjoy the seventy years, and the sun that pours down on the earth, when there is fear in the heart? . . . There are voices crying what must be done, a hundred, a thousand voices. But what do they help if one seeks for counsel, for one cries this, and one cries that, and another cries something that is neither this nor that. (67-68)

Paton’s response is to provide a portrait of one white man who does manage to move beyond his own prejudices and fears towards a greater understanding not only of the fundamental problems of his country, but also of the urgent necessity of attempting to solve them.

Like Stephen Kumalo, James Jarvis is a basically decent man living a sedentary farmer’s life in the Natal hills. His quiet, comfortable world is shattered, however, by the news of his son’s murder in his home in Parkwold, Johannesburg. As a result, he is led, again like Kumalo, on a quest to Johannesburg for his son, which becomes a voyage of discovery and learning about himself and his society. Although his son is already dead when he begins his journey, his search is to understand his son, through his writings and achievements, as he had never done when he was alive.

Jarvis readily admits that “my son and I didn’t see eye to eye on the native question” (119), but he is led into a re-appraisal of his son’s views and devotion to the cause of racial justice partly as a result of his son’s writings which he encounters in Johannesburg and partly because of his realisation of the extent of his son’s reputation and accomplishments. His son’s brother-in-law and friend, John Harrison, pays tribute to his standing in the community, and this is confirmed by the extensive media coverage and the many and diverse sympathy notes which follow his death, but most especially by the numerous guests of all creeds and colours who attend his funeral. As a result, in a way reminiscent of Paton’s “deep experience” at
Edith Rheinallt-Jones’s funeral, Jarvis undergoes his own spiritual and political enlightenment and comes to question and eventually reject his previously held conventional and conservative views.

Jarvis finds his own attitudes challenged and changed to a large extent by reading his son’s articles and essays. His son’s study itself, where he does the reading, with its pictures of Christ and Abraham Lincoln and its great variety of books, gives an initial impression of the quality of his son’s character — broad-minded, tolerant, enlightened, compassionate and deeply concerned about his fellow man — an impression which is substantiated by his son’s writing. Jarvis reads three pieces, in particular, which affect him profoundly. The first, a fragment which he finds on the desk, deals with the very same issue of the broken tribe that Msimangu had broached earlier. In essence, Arthur’s piece focuses on the way in which the whites who came to South Africa conquered the black peoples, and then proceeded to exploit them both politically and economically. It distinguishes carefully between what is “permissible” and what is not, or between what was once considered permissible but which is no longer “in the light of what we know”:

It was permissible to allow the destruction of a tribal system that impeded the growth of the country. It was permissible to believe that its destruction was inevitable. But it was not permissible to watch its destruction, and to replace it by nothing, or by so little, that a whole people deteriorates, physically and morally. (126-127)

Like Msimangu, Arthur concludes that whites have “an inescapable duty” (127) to make appropriate reparation for the harm they have wrought on African society. Indeed, this commonality of concern between Arthur Jarvis and Msimangu is not an insignificant point. For if the ineluctable interconnectedness of the white and black communities in the novel is affirmed in a negative way by the fact that Kumalo’s son kills Jarvis’s son, then the similarity of Arthur’s and Msimangu’s views suggests in a positive manner the actual common ground that exists between the two communities as well as the potential for eventually establishing a fully integrated, common society in South Africa.

The second article, entitled, “The Truth About Native Crime” (119), embodies once more many of the arguments which Paton himself advanced in his *Forum* articles of 1943-1945 discussed earlier. In it, Arthur Jarvis highlights the fact that crime is frequently a result of African social frustration which in turn arises out of the hypocrisies and prejudices of a white community which refuses to allow blacks the opportunities to better themselves and achieve advancement. He goes on, in some of the last words
he wrote, for he was busy with this manuscript when he was killed, to expose the mendacity of so-called white South African Christian society in so far as it condones, even by its silence on the matter, the practice of racial discrimination:

The truth is that our civilisation is not Christian; it is a tragic compound of great ideal and fearful practice, of high assurance and desperate anxiety, of loving charity and fearful clutching of possessions. (134)

"Deeply moved," James Jarvis begins to comprehend the validity of his son's argument, and to move towards the adoption of his son's views and attitudes.

The final turning point occurs when he reads the third piece, "Private Essay on the Evolution of a South African," which it was noted earlier Paton felt was directly applicable to himself. James Jarvis is at first "shocked and hurt" (150) to read his son's comment that although he had learned from his parents the values of "honour and charity and generosity," he had learned "nothing at all" about South Africa (150). But, having recovered, he reads on and recognises the truth of what his son has written, and that it is he, indeed, who must "learn" about South Africa from his son. In particular, he is "moved" by the closing paragraphs, which include Arthur's dedication to the cause of justice and truth in his country:

Therefore I shall devote myself, my time, my energy, my talents, to the service of South Africa. I shall no longer ask myself if this or that is expedient, but only if it is right. (151)

Jarvis walks out of the house into what he now realises has been "a strange country" to him, determined that "he was not going that way any more" (152). The implication is that his conversion is complete and that he has decided to take up and pursue, in his own limited way, his son's goals. As such, he finds guidance through reading one of his son's heroes, Abraham Lincoln; in particular, Lincoln's famous Gettysburg Address, a speech mentioned though not actually quoted in the novel (127):

It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us — that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain . . .

Significantly, before Jarvis leaves to return to Natal, two incidents occur which reveal how his attitudes have changed. In the first, he coincidentally
encounters Stephen Kumalo himself at Springs, where he had gone with his wife to visit her niece, Barbara Smith. Kumalo in turn is there to look for Sibeko's daughter as he has promised to do. Kumalo, in great distress, reveals to Jarvis that it was his own son who murdered Jarvis's son. Despite his shock, Jarvis treats the old man with kindness, unlike Smith's daughter, and the mutual respect shown by the two bereaved men foreshadows their closer contact later on. In the second incident, Jarvis gives John Harrison an envelope containing one thousand pounds for the Claremont African Boys' Club, whose letter to Arthur, their president, Jarvis had come across in his son's study. He expresses the hope that the club might be renamed the "Arthur Jarvis Club," though he does not make this a condition of his donation.

These incidents immediately and directly raise the issue of what sorts of solutions the novel proposes to the problems which it has identified. In particular, it is necessary to consider to what extent these solutions, which are presented from a specifically liberal perspective, constitute a valid, practical and adequate response to the socio-political circumstances described by the novel in South Africa at the time.

III

In addressing the question of the nature and form of the solutions which are advanced in Cry, the Beloved Country, it is useful to begin by considering some of the various criticisms levelled against this aspect of the novel. Most of the criticism directed against Cry, the Beloved Country is of two kinds: in the first place, the novel is accused of embodying a paternalistic attitude towards Africans; in the second, it is condemned for its political naïveté and the ideological inadequacy of its vision for the practical transformation of South African society.

The tone for the first form of criticism — that of paternalism — is set by an anonymous writer for the Times Literary Supplement in an article called "South African Conflicts" which formed part of a "Special Insert" on "Modern Literature" (1957, xxxvi). After disparaging liberal politics in South Africa in general, the writer goes on to assert that, because the political situation has changed so much since Cry, the Beloved Country was published in 1948, the novel has come to be "regarded by many who would have praised it then as an old-fashioned, paternalistic book, which portrays Africans in a sentimental and unrealistic light." This line of attack is picked up by Ezekiel Mphahlele in The African Image (1962) and developed in some detail by Paul Rich (1985), who argues that the novel is in essence a
nostalgic pastoral romance with little sense of historical reality, and he claims that

the novel completely bypasses the emerging black culture of the townships and slums of the Witwatersrand, which are seen only through the deadening lens of Paton's paternalistic moralism that had been fortified by his experiences as Warden of the Diepkloof Reformatory for "delinquent" African boys outside Johannesburg. (1985, 56)

The give-away phrase in this quotation is "delinquent," placed in emphatic inverted commas in an attempt to imply that Paton himself patronisingly regarded his charges as "delinquents." Such an attempt reveals that Rich is either alarmingly unfamiliar with Paton's attitudes and work at Diepkloof (Paton deliberately replaced the title "Warden" with "Principal," and strove to transform the institution from a corrective to an educative one) or he is deliberately distorting the facts to bolster his critique. Similar strictures could be levelled against the Times Literary Supplement writer, who seems quite mistaken in stating that Paton knew little of the "African struggle" before writing Cry, the Beloved Country and only became familiar with South African politics much later (1957, xxxvi); as well as against Mphahlele (1962, 157), who makes several disturbingly inaccurate assertions such as that Stephen Kumalo in the novel "remains the same suffering, child-like character from beginning to end" when the novel is clearly concerned with his maturation and development. Nevertheless, despite the evident limitations of many of these critiques of Cry, the Beloved Country, the charge of paternalism against the novel continues to be made, and so it will be addressed shortly.

The second line of criticism has centred around the view that Paton's liberal outlook is jejune and inefficacious in dealing practically with South Africa's real social problems. Once more, a good deal of such criticism often seems unjust and inaccurate. Mphahlele (1962, 159-160), again, for example, seems very far from the mark when he claims that

because the message keeps imposing itself on us in Cry, the Beloved Country, we cannot but feel how thickly laid on the writer's liberalism is: let the boys be kept busy by means of club activities and they will be less inclined to delinquency; work for a change of heart in the white ruling class (Jarvis's final philanthropic gesture and his son's practical interest in club activities together with his plea to South Africa indicate this).
Nevertheless, Mphahlele is quoted approvingly by Stephen Watson (1982) — before he resiled from a Marxist orientation — who goes on to maintain (1982, 35) that Paton in *Cry, the Beloved Country*

advances the solution of love . . . . Of course, this is useless; the problem has not been caused by a lack of love in South Africa and therefore to prescribe an antidote of love for it is simply naïve and beside the point.

Watson alleges, moreover, that Paton appears unaware that the social problems in the novel “are quite explicable in terms of the man-made reality and historical conditions in South Africa in the first half of the century” (1982, 33), and therefore he is quite wrong to be “preaching for a revolution of hearts . . . rather than for a revolution in social and economic structure” (1982, 37). This argument represents one of the classic Marxist critiques of liberal texts, namely that their understanding of political and economic realities is deficient and that their proposed solutions in terms of “personal love” (Watson 1982, 44) are inadequate. It should be clear from our foregoing discussion of Paton’s background as a social analyst and reformer that Watson’s aspersions on his experience and understanding are unfounded. Similarly, Watson’s assertion that Paton’s proposals for social transformation may be reduced to a plea for increased personal love reveals that Watson has failed to comprehend what the term, “love,” means in the context of the novel. Nonetheless, the charge of political naïveté against a liberal writer like Paton is a grave one, however clumsily it is presented, and it will be treated seriously in the following discussion.

Edward Callan (1982, 38) has pithily labelled Book Three of *Cry, the Beloved Country* “the Book of Restoration,” and there does indeed seem to be in it a shift in tone and mood, as well as in content, beyond an unsettling portrayal of social distress towards a vision of restorative possibilities for the beloved country. Far from being paternalistic and/or naïve, however, this section of the novel offers a variety of valuable, feasible and acceptable short- and long-term solutions to many of the problems which have been identified earlier, as well as providing informed theoretical debate about some of the most difficult dilemmas of the time. These proposed solutions may, in fact, be sub-divided into at least four different levels at which they operate: the level of basic material resources; the physical restoration of the land; the spiritual; and the political. Each of these will be discussed in turn, though naturally, as will be seen, a certain degree of overlap exists between them.

Firstly, in what has often been misrepresented by antagonistic critics as a series of empty paternalistic gestures, Jarvis provides help in the form of
resources at a basic material level. As has already been noted, he donates one thousand pounds to the Claremont Boys Club, a huge sum of money in those days, and by no means an exiguous portion of his reserves. Back in Natal, he provides milk to the black schoolchildren of Ndotsheni when he learns of their shortage from his grandson. And he supplies the materials to repair Kumalo’s leaky church, whose dilapidation he notices during his visit there. It is important to see that these actions are not designed as terminal solutions, but as short-term measures to meet urgent needs. Jarvis does not perform them in a patronising manner, or out of a desire to establish himself in a position of control over the people, or out of some misplaced sense of guilt. On the contrary, he acts from a wish to lend real practical assistance where it is manifestly necessary; in the spirit, one might say, of Archbishop Clayton, who was wont to suggest that, in times of difficulty about what to do, one should “do the next right thing” (in Paton 1973a, 140). As such, Jarvis’s actions, coming from a man who had hitherto not even noticed the needs of the people around him, let alone addressed them, represents real moral progress.

This is not, in any event, the only kind of assistance which Jarvis provides. At a second level, he seeks to facilitate a more permanent and extensive upliftment of the people of Ndotsheni through the restoration of the land, which has become waste through poor farming methods as well as the drought. To help achieve this, he hires a young black agricultural demonstrator, Napoleon Letsisi, whose task it is to teach the people more modern and successful farming techniques, and thus to help them to help themselves. Jarvis’s intention, therefore, is to empower the people to become agriculturally and financially autonomous and self-supporting rather than in any way dependent upon either his skills or his largesse. Once more, it is difficult to see in this case how charges of paternalism may be made against this aspect of the novel. Indeed, at the end of the book, Jarvis announces to Kumalo that he will be leaving his home in Natal to live in Johannesburg with his daughter and her children, thus symbolically giving up his “High Place” (the name of his farm), though he assures Kumalo of his continued support for the “work” in Ndotsheni. This complex issue of land ownership will be examined a little later, though it is worth noting at this point that it is one with which Paton is clearly concerned.

For Kumalo’s part, he too has not been content to do nothing after his return from Johannesburg. Aware of at least the partial validity of his brother’s dictum that “what God has not done for South Africa, man must do” (25), Kumalo seeks actively to effect some positive changes:
Kumalo began to pray regularly in his church for the restoration of Ndotsheni. But he knew that was not enough. Somewhere down here upon the earth men must come together, think something, do something. (195)

However, his initiative proves at first a failure: his visits to the chief and the headmaster bear no fruit, because the chief is a mere figurehead with no insight and no real power, and the headmaster, though well-intentioned, is hopelessly out of touch with the everyday needs of the people, caught up as he is in education department bureaucracy and barren theorisations:

The headmaster explained that the school was trying to relate the life of the child to the life of the community, and showed him circulars from the Department in Pietermaritzburg, all about these matters. He took Kumalo out into the blazing sun, and showed him the school gardens, but this was an academic lecture, for there was no water, and everything was dead. (198)

Nevertheless, despite Kumalo’s failure to mobilise the leaders of the community into effective action, the novel suggests that through his and Jarvis’s combined actions — a white man and a black man coming together and thinking and acting in concert — the land may at least partly be restored, an idea symbolically emphasised by the fact that the drought breaks when they commune together in Kumalo’s church (208-209). It is efforts such as these, it is implied, that will help the present “waste land” (188) to be revitalised as “Africa, the beloved country” (189) once more.

The clear allusion to T. S. Eliot’s poem, *The Waste Land*, in which the moral and spiritual decay of early twentieth-century Europe is laid bare, suggests that Paton is not concerned only with the physical and material regeneration of South Africa. And, indeed, the third level at which the possibility of restoration is explored is the spiritual. Paton remained a deeply committed Christian all his life, and his vision in this novel of the restoration of the land and its people is suffused by his Christian belief in a God who is not merely transcendent but coterminously immanent in the world and involved in human life. It is not only individual souls, but also the fate of society as a whole, of Africa, which rests in a fundamental sense in the hands of God, as expressed in the anthemic prayer, “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika: God save Africa” (191). As such, the Christian message which Paton propounds in the novel is one which resonates at both the individual and the social level.

The novel ends, for instance, with the profoundly religious experience of Stephen Kumalo, his faith restored after his bleak moments of near total despair in Johannesburg, going up the mountain to endure a vigil in which he shares the agony of his son’s last night before execution. Like the biblical
King David, who also lost his beloved but aberrant son, Absalom, and like the first Christian martyr, Stephen, after whom he is named, Kumalo must confront real pain and suffering. But he has by this stage learned the great Christian lesson that “kindness and love can pay for pain and suffering” (193) and that Christ’s divine suffering and love can provide the ultimate “comfort in such desolation” (187). Finally, just before the awful moment, he breaks bread and drinks tea in a private mass recalling Christ’s sacrificial redemption of mankind. Significantly, as he stands facing the dawn, he sees that “the sun rose in the east” (236), suggesting not merely the beginning of a new day, but also, through the profound pun, the promise of resurrection and new life.

Episodes such as this suggest that God is truly present in human affairs and that the Christianity preached and practised in the novel is neither otherworldly nor uninvolved in history. At the very heart of the novel, in fact, is Msimangu’s sermon at Ezenzeleni, a sermon concerned with both personal and social liberation. His text is taken from chapters 40 and 42 of the book of Isaiah, the beginning of what is known as Deutero-Isaiah or Second Isaiah, which prophesies the emancipation of the Israelites from Babylonian captivity, sustained by the power and love of God (see Bright 1980, 354f). As such, while the sermon certainly is meant to provide succour for personal suffering — such as physical blindness — it also affirms the efficacy of God’s intervention in political history. In addition, much of the novel’s implicit political value system seems to derive essentially from the fundamental principles of Christ’s teaching. The Beatitudes (Matthew 5, 1-10), in particular, for example, are concerned not only with individual comforting and heavenly reward, but also, vitally, with such socio-political issues as peace-making, righteousness and justice on earth.

The Christian theme of *Cry, the Beloved Country* seems, therefore, to impinge directly upon the political, appropriately enough since, from Paton’s perspective, the two were intimately connected. Throughout his career, in fact, Paton insisted on the crucial affinity between his liberal political ideals and his Christian beliefs. He has stated (1958b, 278), for instance, that: “Because I am a Christian I am a passionate believer in human freedom, and therefore, in human rights.” He has also expanded (1958c, 11) on what he viewed as the Christian underpinnings of much liberal thought, with specific reference to the South African Liberal Party of which he was a founding member:

Now although the Liberal Party is not a Christian organisation, its policies have a great deal in common with Christian ethics, and its philosophy has been influenced by Christian theology. I shall not
apologise for writing something about these things. If one is a Christian, one believes that there is a spiritual order as well as a temporal, but one also believes that the values of the spiritual order — justice, love, mercy, truth — should be the supreme values of the temporal society, and that the good state will uphold and cherish them. Further one believes that the Church, while without temporal power, has the duty of championing these values in the temporal world.

This is not to suggest, of course, that Christianity and liberalism are interchangeable or identical, but simply that for Paton certain cardinal values are shared by both. It may, therefore, be observed that much of the religious dimension Cry, the Beloved Country functions also as an extension or confirmation of the liberal ideas which are advanced in the novel as a whole.

While acknowledging the pervasiveness of the religious perspective in the novel, it is still viable to isolate a fourth level at which the text offers a sense of the possibility of restoration, namely, the political. This specifically political aspect is conveyed through both the words and the deeds of the various characters in the book. Most obviously, something very close to the liberal political views of Paton himself and other leading liberals of the day is expressed through the writings of Arthur Jarvis, which have already been discussed in some detail. These pieces provide a lucid and coherent outline of liberal political philosophy, based upon both moral grounds and intellectual conviction, and supply a clear course for positive practical action. If there is some objection to them, it may be that they are presented in somewhat too pat a fashion in the novel, rather than growing organically out of the plot structure. Nevertheless, the views expressed in these pieces are lent an urgent immediacy of context through the character, Msimangu, who acts as Kumalo’s intellectual as well as physical guide in Johannesburg. It is he, as has been noted, who asserts that the tribe is broken beyond mending and who insists on the moral responsibility of whites to aid in the development of a new society. It is he also who speaks of the practicalities involved in a transition to a new society where political power will be shared between black and white. Just as Msimangu is scrupulously honest in holding whites largely culpable for the present social and political problems in the country, so he is candid in warning of the dangers inherent in a sudden acquisition of power by the oppressed. Such power, he feels, may very likely become "corrupted" through pride or greed or desire for revenge, and so it is crucial that this power be informed by love:

But there is only one thing that has power completely, and that is love. Because when a man loves he seeks no power, and therefore
he has power. I see only one hope for this country, and that is when white men and black men, desiring neither power nor money, but desiring only the good of their country, come together to work for it. (37)

And he goes on to observe, sombrely and gravely:

I have one great fear in my heart, that one day when they are turned to loving, they will find we are turned to hating. (38)

It is this speech of Msimangu's, which is repeated at the end of the novel, that has particularly led to the novel's condemnation by critics like Stephen Watson (1982) for offering a solution based on love rather than hard political theory. Yet it is, in fact, a speech precisely about politics. What it is vital to understand is that by "love" as it is used here, Paton — via Msimangu — does not mean simply some vague notion of interpersonal goodwill. More properly, the term, "love," may be glossed here as the desire to create and live in a just society, and so the act of loving may be thought of as right political conduct which will help bring about a more equitable socio-political order where all persons can live as freely and fully as possible. It ought, in any event, to be clear from the political context of Msimangu's remarks that he visualises such love in terms of black and white South Africans actively and selflessly working together for "the good of their country" as a whole. This understanding of the political meaning of love lies at the centre of the liberal enterprise, which upholds the principle of social and political corrigibility and amelioration, and believes in the general will and desire of the majority of persons to live under a just system of government. The alternative to liberalism, especially in the politically volatile South African context, is one which Paton, like Msimangu, dreaded. In an article entitled, "On Turning 70," Paton (1973b; in Paton 1975, 258) offered a trenchant response to those who continued to sneer at proponents of a liberal solution to South Africa's problems:

But if Black power meets White power in headlong confrontation, and there are no Black liberals and White liberals around, then God help South Africa. Liberalism . . . is humanity, tolerance, and love of justice. South Africa has no future without them.

In Cry, the Beloved Country itself, Paton is at pains to make clear that the mere verbalisation of liberal sentiments is not enough, and that these sentiments need to be accompanied by meaningful action at the level of the economic and political structures and conditions of society. Hence, it is important to see that characters like Arthur Jarvis and Msimangu do take
active steps to change their society. Msimangu, as Tony Morphet (1983, 7) points out, "is exemplary in showing what to do," tirelessly striving to improve the welfare of his fellow South Africans and inspiring others, like Stephen Kumalo, to emulate his efforts. Similarly, Arthur Jarvis does not simply write articles and correspond with an African boys club, as Mphahlele (1962, 159-160) suggests, but is actively involved in numerous charitable and social organisations, from Toc H and the YMCA to the Society of Christians and Jews and various African social groups. Moreover, he has, as Mr Harrison rather disapprovingly observes, intervened directly in the socio-economic sphere, calling for "more Native schools," protesting "about the conditions at the non-European hospital," and insisting on "settled labour" on the mines (121). In so doing, he shows not only courage and compassion, but also a sound grasp of the social and economic roots of many of his country's problems, as well as an understanding of the basic need for racial equality in the fields of education and health care, and the elimination of unjust labour practices like the migrant worker system. Far from seeming naïve and uninformed, as Stephen Watson (1982, 35) avers, Paton, in Cry, the Beloved Country, reveals an ability to comprehend and address the fundamental problems of his country in a way which even from this vantage point in time appears remarkably perspicacious and illuminating.

What Paton refuses to condone in this novel, or anywhere else for that matter, is what Watson (1982, 37) calls social and political "revolution," to be brought about through the use of violence, if necessary. Throughout his life, Paton resisted any notion of violent revolution, not because he felt personally threatened by it, but because he believed that it would do more harm than good. In South Africa and Her People (1957, 151), for example, he asserts that revolution would not "solve any problems. It would in my opinion bring chaos, from which we would take generations to emerge." It is a tenet which he espoused constantly during the dark days of the sabotage trials of the young members of the Liberal Party who had secretly formed the African Resistance Movement in frustration at the intransigence of the Nationalist Party government; writing of John Harris, the A.R.M. member who was convicted of murder for the Johannesburg Station bomb, Paton (1965, 2) states categorically:

By temperament and principle I am opposed to the use of violence. By intellectual conviction I am opposed to its use in South Africa, believing that it will not achieve its declared purpose of making this country happier and better.
And in his assessment of Hendrik Verwoerd following the Prime Minister's assassination, Paton (1967; in Paton 1968, 269-270) again broaches this most difficult of all liberal dilemmas:

Of course there are some South Africans who feel so deeply and disturbedly about the injustice of the status quo that they declare that violence is the only solution left, and they declare that a person like myself secretly wishes to preserve his own state of privilege, or is simply a coward. I can well understand these views, but I have no intellectual trust in them. If a situation seems unchangeable, there is no reason to believe that violence will change it. One draws back from the prospect of an unending history of murders and assassinations.

This is not to say that Paton, like many other liberal opponents of political injustice in South Africa, was never tempted by the idea of a radical solution to this country's ills. Even in Cry, the Beloved Country, there is a telling scene where Stephen Kumalo, playing with Gertrude's son, acts out a symbolic violent overthrow of the city and, by extension, the political system:

So they brought out the blocks, and built tall buildings like the buildings in Johannesburg, and sent them toppling over to destruction with noise and laughter. (105-106)

But this anarchic impulse passes, for Paton's more considered view is that such violence is ultimately counter-productive and futile, and that there can be no viable alternative to a society founded on the rule of law and transformed, where necessary, only through non-violent means.

It is, perhaps, for this reason that Paton chooses to depict the potentially revolutionary John Kumalo in such a negative light. It is, of course, quite mistaken to think that Paton in this novel was critical or distrustful of black politicians in general. He clearly approves of Dubula and his wife, for example, especially since they strive, like Msimangu and Arthur Jarvis, to translate their beliefs into positive action. Indeed, Paton fully condones the bus boycott and the creation of Shanty Town as legitimate political action consonant with liberal principles of peaceful protest and passive resistance. John Kumalo, on the other hand, does nothing in the service of others and can offer the people little more than his "golden voice," which is disparagingly contrasted with Msimangu's "golden words."

Nevertheless, there remains a problem with Paton's portrayal of John Kumalo. As a number of critics have remarked, his depiction as a selfish coward and corrupt hypocrite detracts from the several valid points which
he makes in conversation and in speeches. For instance, when Stephen Kumalo and Msimangu first visit him, he observes quite rightly that the "tribal society" is "breaking apart" and that a "new society is being built" (34), and he goes on to claim with some justification that the church, like the old chiefs, is doing little to facilitate this social renewal, while the people suffer (35). Even Msimangu is compelled to admit that "many of the things he said are true" (37). Furthermore, his speech to the mine workers seems eminently reasonable, merely calling for decent wages and proposing legitimate strike action, but by no means demanding "equality and the franchise and the removal of the colour-bar" (158-160), as, for example, the A.N.C. had in actuality recently done (see Robertson 1971, 31). As such, it is difficult to know what to make of the narrator's remark that Dubula and Tomlinson listen to his voice "with contempt, and with envy" (158), or of Msimangu's comment:

Perhaps we should thank God he is corrupt... For if he were not corrupt, he could plunge this country into bloodshed (161),

because such statements inevitably serve to undermine the political validity of the speech itself. The difficulty is exacerbated by the fact that the gold mining industry in particular, and materialistic white society in general, have just been excoriated in the third of the choral chapters in the novel, that dealing with the gold rush at Odendaalsrust (145-149).

In fact, the problem is further compounded by Msimangu's strange decision to retire into a religious community where he "would forswear the world and all its possessions" (183), since this seems precisely to remove him from the sphere of practical action and influence which Paton has been highlighting in the novel. It would appear, moreover, to substantiate the views of Msimangu's unnamed critics in the novel who, following Marx's axiom that religion is the opium of the people, despise Msimangu for preaching "of a world not made by hands... making the hungry patient, the suffering content, the dying at peace," and for sending the people "marching to heaven instead of to Pretoria" (82-83).

These elements in the novel are genuinely problematic, and nothing is to be gained from trying to ignore them or wish them away. Perhaps they ought to be viewed as indicative of a real tension in Paton's thinking at that time between his desire for urgent, fundamental change in his society and his apprehension that too rapid or extreme a process of change could prove destructive rather than regenerative, and bring with it widespread social suffering and misery. It must be recognised, for example, as Robertson (1971, 28-39) points out, that many black nationalistic demands of the
1940s, which seem quite moderate from today’s perspective, would have been rejected as unthinkable radical and revolutionary at the time by almost all whites as well as by many blacks. To have tried to implement such demands too quickly would thus have inevitably resulted in violent conflict and repression rather than constructive social amelioration. Paton’s awareness of this dilemma may be deduced from some of the emendations he made to the original manuscript, such as the downplaying of the mine workers’ strike (Oppenheimer collection, Brenthurst Library, Johannesburg). Whatever the source of the problem, it ought not to be allowed to deflect attention away from the central thrust of the novel, namely, that the country must be restored, and that this restoration should take place at a number of different levels.

In fact, Paton’s awareness of the difficulties involved in the regeneration of his society is again underlined when he raises a further thorny problem by linking the literal, agricultural restoration of the land with the political question of land ownership. Paton successfully weaves the issue into the story through the character of the young, politically conscious agricultural demonstrator, Napoleon Letsisi, who is hired by James Jarvis to teach the Ndotsheni community more modern farming methods. In response to Kumalo’s praise of Jarvis, Letsisi remarks,

Umfundisi, it was the white man who gave us so little land, it was the white man who took us away from the land to go to work. And we were ignorant also. It is all these things together that have made this valley desolate. Therefore, what this good white man does is only a repayment. (228)

This deeply problematic question of second-generation rights and the redistribution of the wealth is clearly too much for the old man, however, and, indeed, it is not brought to any definite resolution in the novel. For instance, though James Jarvis is to leave his farm to live in Johannesburg, Paton stops short of suggesting that farmers like Jarvis should relinquish their land, or that they should be encouraged to sell off part of their farms in order to equalise land ownership. This tension between property rights and economic equality remains a problem to this day, however (see Simkins 1986), and Paton could hardly have been expected to resolve it in Cry, the Beloved Country. It is to his credit, in fact, that he presents the issue in all its difficulty, and that he refuses to offer any glib or facile proposals for its solution.

It could well be argued that one of the distinctively liberal features of the novel is its willingness to confront complex problems and to present a
variety of competing viewpoints on the subject rather than a rigid, monolithic ideological perspective. In this novel, as opposed to the typical social realist text, one encounters what a critic like Edward Callan (1982, 35) has called "a multitude of voices":

South African voices talking incessantly about problems — problems of race, problems of language, and problems of separate living space.

As Callan (33) points out, one of the great advantages of this multifaceted perspective is that it provides both an understanding of individual experiences as well as an "overall point of view" on South Africa "and the struggles of its diverse peoples as a whole": it is

a dramatic manifestation of the agony of a country in which the spirit of South Africa hovers always on stage and dominates the human actors.

A similar argument has recently been advanced by the Italian critic, Armando Pajalich (1992, 223), who has described the novel's narrative mode as "dialogic," in that it is made up essentially of a continuous dialogue between a variety of voices in conflict. Although he suggests (1992, 227-228) that Paton does not express a truly comprehensive spectrum of black opinion, he maintains, like Callan, that the novel derives several major benefits from its "polyphony" (his term for a "multitude of voices"). In particular, he believes that this sophisticated narrative strategy permits a variety of problems to be confronted "objectively and dialectically," while avoiding the inevitably simplistic bias of "a definite or univocal closure."

This readiness to express divergent ideas, and this refusal to offer facile utopian solutions to complex problems, represents some of the greatest strengths of liberalism, and may well help to explain the remarkable success of the novel. Far from descending into crude propaganda or arid theorisation, the novel manages to expose and explore some of the central social concerns of South Africa in a way which is moving, honest and enlightening. Moreover, while it remains deeply aware of the intensity and extent of the problems it identifies, it retains a sense of hope, however tentative, for the future, based not upon naïve idealism, but upon a fundamental belief in the power of humankind's innate desire for freedom and justice to prevail.

In *Cry, the Beloved Country*, Paton reveals himself to be keenly aware of the complex debates going on about South Africa's social, political and economic problems. As a liberal, however, he is interested not merely in general social theory but also in the individuals who make up the society.
As such, his principal concern in the novel is to explore how these problems and their possible resolution are experienced at the level of the individual, of ordinary human beings. This he does especially through the characters of Stephen Kumalo and James Jarvis.

At the beginning of the novel, Stephen Kumalo and James Jarvis, though technically neighbours, live in totally different worlds, each utterly ignorant of the other. For example, Kumalo reveals to Father Vincent that he knows of Jarvis "by sight and name," but has never spoken to him (65); and Jarvis, in conversation with Mr Harrison, vaguely remembers the mission at Ndotsheni and its old parson, but can recall little about them (123). By the end of the novel, however, the two men have grown significantly closer together, and have established meaningful human contact, if only briefly and haltingly. Paton traces the gradual but steady development of their relationship through a number of carefully depicted incidents. Their first actual meeting, as noted earlier, occurs by chance at Springs, but the mutual respect they reveal to each other then lays the foundation for their future association. Their next meeting takes place during Jarvis's efforts to aid the Ndotsheni community, when, in a scene heavy with significance, they shelter from the drought-breaking rain in the local church. Later still, their communication continues through the wreath for Mrs Jarvis and the sympathy note which Kumalo organises and sends from Ndotsheni; and through Jarvis's letter of thanks, which, incidentally, convinces the bishop to allow Kumalo to stay on in Ndotsheni.

Finally, they meet fortuitously at the end of the story as Kumalo is on his way to his vigil for his son, and this last encounter provides some measure of how far the two men have come in their relationship (231-232). This meeting occurs in solitude and, as it were, on common ground — literally the mountain near the village but symbolically the holy mountain of Isaiah (11, 6-9) where "the wolf shall lie down with the lamb":

They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the
knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

The symbol of the holy mountain held great significance for Paton, and recurs throughout his work, most notably in the title of his first volume of autobiography. In one sense, it represents the teleological hope of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, but in another, Paton uses it to suggest the ideal of a just society, particularly in the South African context (see Paton 1975, 288, for example). Thus, the setting of this final meeting between Kumalo
and Jarvis is not accidental but carefully chosen to betoken the possibility of the real and meaningful reconciliation of the races in South Africa. Paton is particular, however, to avoid rendering the scene implausible, and so the white man remains mounted while the black man stands on foot and there is no physical contact for "such a thing is not lightly done" (232). Nevertheless, despite the gathering darkness, the two men find the words to thank each other for their kindness and to console each other for their loss, and, in so doing, to confirm the potential for true human interaction that they have established. Such potential is reinforced by the fact of the generations coming after them: Jarvis's "bright" young grandson who has clearly inherited some of his father's best qualities; Kumalo's promising young nephew and daughter-in-law; and the child about to be born to take the place of the father who is about to die.

These details are clearly meant to provide some of the "comfort in desolation" that has been proposed in the narrative. However, while Paton seems adamant in this novel that there is, indeed, "hope for South Africa" (see Paton 1958), he is also at pains to emphasise that it is by no means certain how or when that hope will be actualised. Hence, in the last pages of the novel, the pervasive theme of fear is repeated, particularly Msimangu's great fear that when the whites finally turn to loving, they will find the blacks responding only with vengeful hatred. The famous final paragraph captures the complex mood of the novel perfectly:

But when that dawn will come, of our emancipation, from the fear of bondage and the bondage of fear, why, that is a secret. (236)

The implication is that just as the literal dawn comes at the end of the book, so this political dawn must, of necessity, occur, even though it is difficult to predict precisely when this might be. As such, the novel may be said to end on a clear, if restrained, note of expectancy, a sentiment which seemed, perhaps, quite justified in 1946. After all, South Africa seemed to be on the verge of a political liberalisation. South African servicemen had recently returned from victory over the forces of Nazism and Fascism, and had been exposed to more enlightened international attitudes. Prime Minister Jan Smuts himself had composed the Preamble to the United Nations Charter, which had been ratified by the South African Parliament on 7 February 1946. And the liberal-minded Jan Hofmeyr seemed set to take over from Smuts as Prime Minister of the country. As it turned out, however, D. F. Malan's National Party won a shock election victory in May 1948, just a few months after the publication of Cry, the Beloved Country, and plunged the country into more than forty years of apartheid rule.
IV

The fact that the note of muted optimism sounded at the end of *Cry, the Beloved Country* proved to be unfounded, at least for many years, should not detract from the overall value and significance of the novel. Throughout the apartheid period, *Cry, the Beloved Country* represented a source of humane political principles and served as a powerfully influential document of social protest in South Africa. Although it is true that several novels up to that time had dealt with what was rather loosely referred to as “the native question” — most notably William Plomer’s *Turbott Wolfe* (1925) and Peter Abrahams’s *Mine Boy* (1946) — none had done so in as comprehensive, insightful and moving a fashion. Christopher Hope (1985, 41) has rightly termed *Cry, the Beloved Country* “the great exemplar” of protest novels in South Africa, of “powerful works which lay bare the evil of apartheid.” Jack Cope (1970, 13), moreover, has claimed that *Cry, the Beloved Country* ushered in “a new period” in South Africa’s literary history and that “with this book, South African fiction really came into its own,” not least of all because “there is a new awareness in it of the man on the other side of the barbed wire, a true fellow-feeling between white and black as we had never had before.”

Following the demise of apartheid, the popularity and influence of *Cry, the Beloved Country* and Paton’s work in general has, if anything, increased. A new film version of *Cry, the Beloved Country*, directed by Darryl Roodt, was released in 1995; his short stories and autobiographical account of Diepkloof were turned into a television series by Roy Sergeant in 1997; his collected poems were published under the title *Songs of Africa* in 1995; Peter Alexander wrote his biography, *Alan Paton*, in 1994; and increasing numbers of theses and articles appear each year. There are several reasons for the continued interest in Paton and especially his first great novel. The most obvious is that *Cry, the Beloved Country* is a fine work of art, in which vital social and political issues emerge organically and coherently from vivid, moving details of plot and characterisation. Another is that many of the problems and debates raised in the novel persist in the South Africa of today as the country struggles to throw off the injustices of the past and to normalise itself. Problems such as unemployment, poverty, insufficient housing, inadequate educational opportunities, as well as, most evidently, the unacceptably high crime rate, remain crucially pertinent. In fact, reading the novel today inspires the uncanny feeling that, in terms of its portrayal of social ills, it might have been written in 1998 rather than 1948.

The one great difference, of course, is that South Africa has managed to transform itself into a constitutional liberal democracy. Had Paton lived, he
would no doubt have been deeply gratified that his vision of a just political
dispensation had been achieved and that it had come about through peaceful
negotiated means. On the other hand, he would also, no doubt, have spoken
out against corruption and the seeming inability of the government to deal
effectively with many of the social problems identified above. His wise
counsel and insight are preserved, however, in his books, especially in Cry,
the Beloved Country. Above all, the continuing relevance of the novel lies
in the principles and values which underpin it: the courage to confront social
problems honestly and openly; the resolve to take action to alleviate such
problems; and a faith in the power of ordinary individuals to take
responsibility for themselves and their communities in improving the
quality of life. The example set by Stephen Kumalo and James Jarvis
remains no less relevant and important today than it was half a century ago.

WORKS CITED

Anonymous. 1957. Times Literary Supplement No.2894 Special Insert: A Sense of
Direction: being an examination of the efforts of writers to keep or regain
contact with the everyday realities of life in terms of modern literature ("South
African Conflicts"). 16 August: xxxvi.
10-20.
Macmillan.
12.1: 41-46.
10.2: 1-10.
Pajalich, Armando. 1992. Una Litteratura Africana Coloniale di Lingua Inglese,
excerpt from chapter 10, "Alan Paton e la Narrativa ‘Liberal’," translated as:
"Alan Paton and the ‘Liberal’ Narrative," by J. A. Kearney; personal
communication.


Roodt, Darryl (director). 1995. *Cry, the Beloved Country* (Film).

