

CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY: LAND, SEGREGATION AND THE CITY

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The current moment of reconciliation and reconstruction, captured in the language of President Mandela's swearing in, and in the celebration of South Africa's return to the Commonwealth, is saturated with the feelings and themes of the most acknowledged book of South Africa: *Cry, the Beloved Country*. The national compromise between the leadership of the African majority and the old white order, appears at times in direct response to Msimangu's prophesy '...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'.¹ The present initiatives appear to countermand the fateful destiny of the land. The essential theme of *Cry, the Beloved Country* is of a profound and deeply patriotic sense of inter-racial reconciliation, made possible through the infusion of Christian forgiveness. This script is now being acted out by our central political characters. The healing of the land appears as the human response to divert the tragically beautiful country from its historic logic of division and death. Heroes have arisen to turn the country away from a fateful destiny towards a brighter future. The sword is sheathed, the prophesy loses its sting, and the politics of coalition and compromise is ascendent. A precarious, fragile, but positive outcome arises from the debris of the past.

As no other book on our country, *Cry, the Beloved Country* maintains its inordinate power of symbolising and explaining to an international readership the essential dilemmas, systematic social devastation, and (what appears at times) frail hope for a resolution of South Africa's problems. Sales of the book continue at high levels, reprints are made in India and the United States and market remains solid. Internationally it is regarded as having epic dimensions: it is used in schools in post-independence Zimbabwe, in schools throughout India. It is universally read, a school textbook, and has coloured the approach of millions towards South Africa. In the wider context it has won ascendance as a charter for the conservative liberal, the Christian vision of change.

Cry, the Beloved Country is now a cultural and political landmark; during a recent visit Coretta King mentioned the three individuals who have made Durban internationally recognised: Dube, Ghandi, and Paton. Arising from the work of these personages are the

following institutions: the educational institute Ohlanga, the Phoenix experiment in non-violence, and the cultural achievement of the most famous white liberal. Much has been laid waste by time: the first with apparently dim links to its original emancipatory vision, the Phoenix arising from ashes has returned to the ashes in the bitter armed battles of Bhambayi, but the written word lives on, in some ways with greater strength.

This amazing power is a continuing paradox; sceptical readers find their critical judgment clouded and the heart succumbing to its tragic theme. The black critic scoffing at what might be termed the 'Jim goes to Johannesburg' presentation of black life, discovers a black leadership taking up its language. Its themes appear suddenly rejuvenated and a statement of the present. The beloved face lifts from tears and turns to laughter.

The author and the political task

In assessing Paton's master work, extra-literary criteria are not inappropriate. In his preface Paton makes an extraordinary claim for a novel stating that 'as a social record it is the plain and simple truth'. This is an unusual claim for a literary work and positions it, in one sense, somewhere between high literature and social criticism. As such it attracts a critique or analysis from complementary or antagonistic outlooks. It will be argued that Paton establishes a particular world view of the realities of South Africa which invite a particular outlook.

The book takes up the theme of a softer South African patriotism, the universal idiom of the tragedy of apartheid, and the inexorable tragedy of South Africa itself.

Cry, the Beloved Country is sub-titled 'A story of comfort in desolation'; and here we must examine the practical comfort offered. In his tragic vision is Paton locked into a perspective in which, in Marx's words, (in the *Poverty of Philosophy*) he sees 'in poverty nothing but poverty, without seeing in it the revolutionary, subversive side, which will overthrow the old society'? Does Paton indulge or grapple with the stubborn issues of South Africa's destiny?

Assessed over time, *Cry, the Beloved Country* has many unexpected lasting strengths. Recent reviews have taken up the liberal's misunderstanding of the relationship between ideology and the economy. But a rereading of Paton's work uncovers a surprising understanding of the political economy: at least in the dimension of the relationship between English capitalist and despotic state (including his ambiguous attitude to Oppenheimer), the white arguments for the necessity of the pass laws, and the mining companies use and defence

of the cheap labour system. This is a multi-faceted approach of some sophistication, reflecting in the discourse of white society the rigorous defence of entrenched positions and a certain *realpolitik* missing from subsequent liberal analysis and practice.

Ironically in *Cry, the Beloved Country*, he sees the key relationships between the pass system, the Afrikaner bureaucracy, and big corporations, as he later fiercely defends liberalism against its close relation to big capital and against any relationship with the defence of segregation. Ironically also, this is the fundamental understanding of South African *realpolitik* which Paton and the other liberals in the political field attempt to repudiate: the link of capital to the ideas of segregation, their support for the core apartheid state, the alliance of Afrikaner nationalism and English capitalism, and the conservatism of the English in supporting the pass laws.

But Paton, in conveying the drama of the struggle for individual and national redemption, has to go beyond the liberal understanding and describe what is.

In the book, Harrison (the old man Jarvis's friend in the mining industry in Johannesburg) discusses the struggle for higher wages, providing a bleak outlook if these were conceded, and the cheap labour system abolished:

There wouldn't be any industry... industry depends on the mines to provide the money that will buy its products. And this Government of ours soaks the mines every year for a cool seventy per cent of the profits. And where would they be if there were no mines? Half the Afrikaners in the country would be out of work. There wouldn't be any civil service, either. Half of them would be out of work, too (131).

Here the key relationship is made between English capital, the necessary repression of wage demands of African workers, and the need to sustain a political relationship with an oppressive state. This extends to his understanding of the special pleading, the ideological statement of the spokesman for the Chamber of Mines after the mine strike, asserting its unchallenged hegemony: 'everybody knows that rising costs would threaten the very existence of the mines, and the very existence of South Africa' (163).

To an extraordinary degree Paton succeeds, with a great economy of language, to raise virtually every contradiction still afflicting our lives. He delves into the multitudinous contradictions of our society, traversing the fantastic contrast of wealth and impoverishment; the problems of suppression and freedom; the question of innocence and brutalization; the alternatives of political logic and demagoguery; the life of migrant labour/settled worker; misunderstandings of youth and age, of father and son; the town versus the countryside; the

tyranny of custom and the freedom to act; and the relationship of Africanism to universal human experience.

All this is done with an imaginative recollection of the life of African people with images that reverberate in the mind, such as the dancing boy who salutes Kumalo on his return from Johannesburg: 'He turns away and makes the first slow steps of a dance, for no person at all, but for himself' (189), and the calling of the people from hill to hill.

Paton establishes a magnificent sense of place and time. In his biography Paton records that the 'magic country... laid me under a kind of spell'. Ixcopo, where Paton arrived as a teacher at Ixcopo High School in 1925, was the centre of a strong white farming community which kept it alive. The labourers were poor but had land. 'All these communities led their own lives and made their own pleasures. History, conquest, and prejudice had separated each from the others.' Yet Paton also remarks upon its inherent peace.²

Much of the beauty has now gone 'because the grass and bracken and the rolling hills and the rich farms have in large part given way to the endless plantations of gum and wattle and pine, and the titihoya does not cry there anymore'. Many farmers have left and farmsteads are now homes and offices of timber managers, and the lowing of cattle has given way to whining of sawmills.

The paralysis of will: a comparison

There is in *Cry the Beloved Country* the fundamental exploration of human interaction in a political society in which the relations between superior and subordinate, master and servant, oppressor and oppressed, are regulated to the minutest degree. Comparisons are often made between racial society in South Africa and other societies characterised by caste and other social systems restrictive of freedom, but it is worth noting that all restriction of freedom is in the last instance based on the degree of control to access to means of life; to land, water, jobs, wages, etc.

Segregation and apartheid were marked by the profound weakness of decent men (and reference is made to men because both black and white South African society are described as very strictly patriarchal). 'It is fear that rules this land' (25). The emotion is pervasive, the corruption of the human spirit inexorable, the paralysis of will almost complete. A suffocating envelope surrounds the individual, an asphyxiation only lifted in the mountains (72).

This paralysis of will expresses essentially the dilemma of the liberal, a privileged individual sustained by the political economy of privilege: earning directly or indirectly the dividends of the sweated labour of the gold mines, served by the black domestic servant, and whose property is defended by a murderous police force. Caught between the volatile black opposition (half understood, half supported, and comprehensively feared) and the obdurate and increasingly oppressive state, the liberal's voice grows faint and weak. Taken as a whole its links to the black nationalist opposition are tenuous and tend to snap time and again under any serious pressure.

This was the fate also of many decent white men and women, attempting to make an act of generosity but paralysed by the opprobrium of white society and fear of 'ingratitude' from blacks. Paton skilfully captures the exaggerated emphasis in the semi-colonial society of segregation and apartheid on tyrannous 'custom', the inhuman exchange between black and white, the dictation of subordination and humiliation. 'Custom' in Paton's language is particularly strongly developed and is raised to the power of *mores*, social rules which are considered so vital to society's well-being that a person who violates them will be judged either as immoral or insane. These *mores* envelop and paralyse the white man, the one with power to make the change, prescribing in the smallest detail the relations of superiority and subordination. The subordinate people are ritually prescribed the daily experience of a conquered people.

It is almost impossible for white and black people to grasp this unspoken power today. Is this inability the result of intense shame or just of the casual attitude towards history of the present generation? Or deeper still, is it based in the humiliation of even acknowledging that such things were ever accepted?

These *mores* have the same intensity as the caste system which is still very much alive in India and also based on material inequality, the same outward appearance, and the same feelings of hatred, fear, and disgust of the superior for the subordinate. The South African context, by contrast, represents the development of a capitalism symbiotically linked to tribal authority, in short, the incomplete operation of the capital relation. The rulers were ruled by the fear of creating a black proletariat severed from the land, and the fear of formal equality. As Legassick has argued, this logical fear of the white rulers first found its expression in segregation which supported the cheap labour system by employing land in the reserves to subsidise wages on the mines and industry. The land was used to shore up the physical and

social divisions between white and black, to sustain cultural differences, and to continue to trap blacks in a state of semi-consciousness of a common destiny and a dual consciousness of tribe and nation.

John Stuart Mill has made the observation that 'propertylessness is not the only factor, or even the crucial one, determining inner-consciousness or political will'. The racial setting in all its pervasive manifestations and the inner-consciousness of its dictatorship, appear brilliantly confirmed in *Cry, the Beloved Country*, but only at the first level of understanding. Mill states only half the truth, namely that the immediate sensuous recollection is not of the determinant of property or the lack of it. It derives, instead, from an understanding of the social setting, of the conquest and impoverishment of the African and of the wealth and accumulation of the 'European', the entire racial relation and its associated inner-consciousness, which is imbued with the determinants of possession or absence of property.

A comparison with, for example, *The Grapes of Wrath*³ (a novel with many similarities and resonating themes) may be useful in order to illuminate the question. There is evidence that Paton had read Steinbeck's novel before writing, and was influenced by its recording of conversation, and the pithy approximation of the language of the people. More importantly both record the devastation of the countryside and the brutality with which the breaking up of rural communities takes place. In *Grapes of Wrath* this process is strongly identified (albeit only ultimately), as finance capital.

In discussing the effect of companies and banks on the land, Steinbeck writes: 'They breathe profits; they eat the interest on money. If they don't get it, they die the way you die without air, without side-meat. It is a sad thing, but it is so. It is just so' (31).

There is the same paralysis of will, an almost literal control of the human individual. The driver could not control the tractor smashing the tenants' shack... 'A twitch at the controls could swerve the car', but the driver's hands could not twitch because the monster that built the tractor, the monster that sent the tractor out, had somehow got into the driver's hand, into his brain and muscle, had goggled him and muzzled him -- goggled his mind, muzzled his speech, goggled his perception, and muzzled his protest' (35).

In maddened desperation the tenants want to shoot the man giving orders: the bank, the president of the bank, the board of directors, the 'east':

'But where does it stop? Who can we shoot? I don't aim to starve to death before I kill the man that's starving me.

The driver: I don't know. Maybe there's nobody to shoot. Maybe the thing isn't men at all. Maybe, like you said, the property's doing it' (37).

Here there is no ambiguity about the character of the oppressive relationship. Finally in *Cry, the Beloved Country* as in the American novel, humanity is confronted with the tyranny of the invisible. But only after a layered analysis does this appear as the capital relation: the subordination of the individual to an unseen objective and crushing social power devastating the possibility for human existence.

Liberalism, nightmare of segregation, and the leprous city

Cry, the Beloved Country is conceived of as a great emancipatory novel, but it was born in the period of segregation and carries over into its tragic vision many of the beliefs and problems of segregation. Its lingering and powerful themes are those of the moral depravity of the city and the moral durability of the people of the land, and of the need for rural reconstruction rather than urban development. This vision is only partially emancipated from the segregationist paradigm; at times there is an implicit argument that African people are not part of modern society (e.g. as the Reverend Kumalo stumbles around town) and have to be protected from the corrosive effects of modernity.

This extraordinary contradiction can only be explained in terms of the influences on Paton's thought and the conditions of the time. Imagination, facts, and the formidable influence of other people come together in Paton's creative outpouring.

In his autobiography *Towards the Mountain*, Paton lists as some of the great influences in his life Jan Hofmeyr, Clayton, and Hoernle. Each one of these personages was liberal in the sense of being open-minded in the observance of orthodox or traditional forms but certainly not radical -- that is going beyond the orthodox and traditional. Theirs is the reinforcement of a core of values wrapped up in the idea of the traditional which also contain the elements of apartheid tyranny. Paton equivocates between the modification of the traditional and the radical impulses of a Trevor Huddleston.

Jan Hofmeyr, the liberal who rose to the position of acting prime minister during the war years, was in favour of liberal amelioration and administrative reform within the context of segregation. He was linked to the famous statement by Smuts in addressing the Institute of

Race Relations in 1942: 'Isolation has gone and I am afraid segregation has fallen on evil days too'.⁴ Paton's hope was that Hofmeyr, as Smuts' likely successor, could move beyond the orthodoxy of segregation.

At about the same time (1943⁵) there was a crisis in the church with regard to so-called 'qualified' suffrage and the 'gradual removal of the colour-bar'. Rather than support the radical Christians including Father Trevor Huddleston and the Rev Michael Scott, Paton supported Clayton who argued: 'The Church is not here primarily to serve society. Its prime duty is to worship God and obey Him.' He was more patient with those not wanting the church to change its stance, and accepted the opposition of important figures in the mining industry to the question of ending migratory labour on moral grounds: 'They shuddered at what would happen to family life if men were allowed to bring their wives and children to the great city of Johannesburg'. Clayton had substantial financial support from some of the mining houses.⁶

Finally, and most significantly, Paton was influenced by R.F.A. Hoernle, the liberal theorist on race relations. Paton writes in his autobiography that he refused to radiate hope in a 'faith which is unthinking'; his mind was clear, logical, and cold. In a famous set of lectures delivered in 1939, Hoernle sets out three possible 'liberal native policies': race assimilation, parallelism, and total separation. Opposed to 'race fusion', he favoured the idea of total separation: in his terms 'self-government' with mutual cooperation.⁷

This great influence on Paton's life discusses ideas as ideas, failing to recognise in the implantation of these ideas the generation of a racist discourse which has had such horrifying consequences in South Africa. His thinking follows a certain liberal tradition of putting forward ideas which have had appalling results in terms of social policy. Edgar Brookes, later a close friend of Paton and previously Principal of Adams College, supported and developed the policy of segregation in the book *A History of Native Policy in South Africa*, published in 1924. This book would later be used by Hertzog in arguing for segregation, and many of its ideas elaborated further by the ideologists of apartheid.

This apparent incongruity may be explained in a number of ways. Foremost among these must be that the transmutation of clinical and 'pure' ideas into policies with frightful effects are the unintended consequences of our actions. Unfortunately for this argument, it seems as though the liberals, while not in the forefront of implementing policy, did not actually step outside the assumptions of segregationism. In attempting to resolve the problems of

segregation, they were not averse to thinking of themselves as a 'think-tank' for the white government.⁸ More than that, they saw themselves as an integral part of the white establishment. Both Hoernle and Brookes employ the term 'we' and 'us' in reference to the white ruling strata of South Africa, indicating a sense of being close to the centre of power and being influential in shaping the policies of the ruling circles. In these terms liberalism was entirely separated from democracy, because it had no vision of a non-oppressive common society.

The 'liberal spirit' mentioned by Hoernle was not committed to full racial equality and democracy or to a struggle against racial dictatorship, but, in Paton's words, to 'truth, justice and compassion', attributes which could be considered appropriate for a ruling strata rather than a struggle from below.⁹ As Heller explains, these are the virtues of rulers; one cannot expect the ruled to be truthful, just and compassionate with their rulers -- only faithful and obedient.¹⁰

This failure of vision of a common society with a common destiny explains the paralysis of will of the liberal. Even the hero of the book, the anguished liberal young man Arthur Jarvis, implies he is prepared to consider the separation of black and white (127).

The liberals were late converts from segregation, and only partial converts at that. It was only late in Hoernle's life, during the war years, that he conceded that segregation was practically impossible, and he protested against proposals to eliminate Alexandra, the black township adjoining the white northern suburbs. But the primary paradigm for these 'conservative liberals' (Paton's term) was that of development of the rural areas and to rebuild African communities on the land (another utopian goal). The terrifying reality was that the ideas of segregation and separation gained a momentum of their own in the favourable ground of racial politics and finally reaped a bitter harvest.

We are all products of our time and work with the material of our time, although the visionary and the scientist can point to the markers of the future and escape many of the limitations of the time. *Cry, the Beloved Country* only partially escapes the limitations of the time, the influences on the author, and the constrictions of imagination. These features are evidenced not in the grand theme of the reconciliation of man with man, but in man's social context.

The conservative in the liberal paradigm: the countryside, the tribe and the town

The plot of *Cry, the Beloved Country* is of an old man Reverend Kumalo who is seeking his only son swallowed up in the dangerous unknowable city. His painful tracing of his son's movements is soon paralleled by the bloodhounds of the police seeking the same prey. Kumalo's son, Absalom, in search of money, shoots the foremost young liberal of the time, the son of the conservative white farmer Jarvis. He is caught by the police and after a trial sentenced to death. Kumalo returns to Ixopo with the pregnant young wife of his son. After much soul-searching and a revelation that he never knew his son, Jarvis turns towards the old pastor to strive to recreate the land.

An important theme of the book is the countryside versus the town: the story starts and ends in the rural area, the excursion into the city is bewildering and destructive, bringing about the crushing of the human spirit.

Paton describes the degradation of the land and the destruction of the rural communities; the earth is a central image and nature brooding and uncertain; in a frightful image the land is compared to human flesh:

The great red hills stand desolate, and the earth has torn away like flesh. The lightning flashes over them, the clouds pour down upon them, the dead streams come to life, full of the red blood of the earth (7).

He has a vision of the soil being the basis of the family, but 'The soil cannot keep them (the youth) any more'. Paton's response is almost spiritual: 'Stand unshod on it, for the ground is holy, being even as it came from the Creator. Keep it, guard it, care for it, for it keeps men, guards men, cares for men. Destroy it and man is destroyed' (7).

Paton's vision of the land and people is connected with a particularly lyrical form of Africanism which constantly surfaces: for example, the calling of voices from hill to hill: 'If you are a Zulu you can hear what they say, but if you are not, even if you know the language, you would find it hard to know what is being called. Some white men call it magic, but it is no magic, only an art perfected. It is Africa, the beloved country' (189).

To some extent the liberal and Africanist have shared the same paradigm, the obsession with the rural and devastated land, while living in the midst of the city full of the promise of radical transformation. There was a similar discourse in the 1920s and 30s over legislation leading to the 'exchange' of the vote for land, and an embroilment in ideas of separation and segregation. This was repeated in the rise of black consciousness on the one hand (with its

preoccupation with attempting to recreate the African presence on the land), and the Bantustans on the other. As early as 1913 Dube had written a letter to South African Prime Minister Botha stating on behalf of the ANC that 'We make no protest against the principle of segregation so far as it can be fairly and practically carried out'.¹¹

It was this seam of thought in African thinking, this reflection of the idea of the ruling strata, that Verwoerd later mined as the African working class developed. When segregation broke down, there was the turn towards retribalisation. The erection of the Bantustans was aimed at trapping the African middle class into collaborative structures which they had an interest in sustaining, a particularly lasting and bitter legacy maintaining a society of semi-segregation, migrant labour and oppression for the majority of the rural people. It institutionalised backwardness and a parasitic bureaucracy. It was the opposite of civil society.

It was a constant theme of segregationary thinking that the city was the focus for the 'demoralisation' and 'disintegration' of African life. A discourse of disgust for the city developed in the language of the missionary, the administrator, and the liberal, stressing the moral decay of African people in the towns. This discourse was particularly hostile to the idea of women coming to the city to live 'dissolute' lives in 'vice' and 'intemperance'.¹² The city was to be a place of work for African males only.

In Paton's evocation of the city we find the petty thief's exploitation of the simple old man, the squalid township life, especially that of the African woman, beerbrewer and prostitute, the corruption of the youth and its criminal direction, and the pathetic attempts at a better life. Essentially the city is the place of personal destruction, criminality and unrelenting poverty. Is this the limit of the 'plain and simple truth'?

But Paton, the man of imagination and insight, also sees the vitality of the ordinary people. In one instance of real insight he describes the spread of the squatter movement, the suffocating overcrowding of existing housing propelling people to occupy land in order to survive.

Still, the African adaptation to the city is somehow faulty. Although we meet the sympathetic politician, Dabula, who represents the heart of the African resistance, patiently explaining the need to hold fast to the bus boycott, the strongest representation of the African national movement is in John Kumalo, an unprincipled, personally treacherous and wild demagogue who is held back only by his fear. Yet it is John Kumalo who makes the telling pronouncement:

It is breaking apart, your tribal society. It is here in Johannesburg that the new society is being built. Something is happening here, my brother (34).

Johannesburg appears as a vastly destructive vortex, corrupting and destroying Blacks and building a veneer of prosperity for whites. In surely one of the harshest statements about South African urban centres, Paton writes, 'No second Johannesburg is needed upon the earth. One is enough' (149). The city is also the place of death of the best white culture has to offer -- the young Jarvis and his attempts at reform.

Finally, one is struck by the deeply conservative portrayal of the city; of the idea of urban development repudiated, of the deadened prospects in the city, in fact, of no prospects at all but for the intelligent social work of an Institute of Race Relations type approach embodied in Arthur Jarvis. Like much of the literature and social concern of the 40s and 50s, the novel turns its back on an exploration of the urban dilemma and returns literally to the rural origins.

The prospect for reconstruction

The book concludes with a powerful image of the strange meeting of two apparent polar opposites: the fathers of the murdered and the murderer. It is the conservative land-owner Jarvis who makes peace with the ageing pastor Kumalo and starts the motion of land reclamation and redevelopment.

In a not entirely utopian vision Paton draws the two men together around the possibility of reclamation. He explores the possibilities and limits of rural reconstruction in the setting of Ixcopo through the debates between Kumalo and the agricultural demonstrator. The idyllic belief that the land could be restored and the people possibly attracted back to the land is held in check by the radical and intelligent demonstrator.

Has Paton entirely entrusted the vision of national redemption to the idea of rural reconstruction on the basis of individual responsibility? Yes and no. Jarvis initiates rural reclamation from a sense of Christian duty revived by his reading of his son's papers. But Paton is also sensitive to the dilemmas this opens up; the very distant prospects of the people returning to the land and of the government supporting such action. There are no prescriptions, and the debate between the agricultural demonstrator and Reverend Kumalo shows his awareness of the dilemma. The young man understands that no agricultural reform

will draw people back to the land and sees Jarvis' initiatives as simple repayment for conquest and enforced labour. Seen in its total perspective, however, the reconciliation between individual black and white around the local initiative towards rural reconstruction appears to be his consolation.

Paton also shows an acute perception of chiefly authority making ponderous attempts to change, acquiescing in some reforms while insisting on a colonial-tribal absolutism, characterised by a contempt for subjects and a deep sense of inertia. The rural reformatory impulse is strongly restrained by this institution shored up by the government. In possibly one of the sharpest comments in South African literature he describes how the chiefs sat

with arrogant and bloodshot eyes, rulers of pitiful kingdoms that had no meaning at all. They were not all like this; there were some who had tried to help their people, and who had sent their sons to schools. And the Government had tried to help them too. But they were feeding an old man with milk, and pretending that he would one day grow into a boy (196).

In the end we know, of course, that nothing came of this contemporary vision for rural reconstruction, except for the enforcement of the conservative stranglehold of the tribe which was everywhere the underpinning of the Bantustans. Paton shows great insight into the chief's fear of the youth, their reactionary spirit of traditional authority, and the state's encouragement of this process. The tone is prophetic.

Is Paton ignorant of political economy? I have argued above that Paton shows an insight into the operation of the cheap labour system and the relationship between capital and the ideology of segregation. In contrast to the operations of the cheap labour system and the degradation of human beings in the unrelentingly destructive migrant labour of gold mining, (representing universal money), Paton develops a conception of a moral economy of a new order, counterposing a different conception of money:

For mines are for men, not for money. Money is for food and clothes and comfort, and a visit to the pictures. Money is to make happy the lives of children. Money is for security, and for dreams, for hopes, and for purposes (149).

The question as to how this moral order could become ascendent is left unanswered by Paton, except in the idea of morality. The young man Arthur Jarvis develops a speech (126-127) which divides 'the permissible' from the 'no longer permissible' on the basis of the development of morality deepened by knowledge and the perspective of enlightened self-interest. He turns to confront the question of segregation:

It is true that we hoped to preserve the tribal system by a policy of segregation. That was permissible. But we never did it thoroughly or honestly.

This is the limit set by the liberal dilemma. When it comes to a resolution of the questions, Jarvis' manuscript breaks off as he rises from the table to face his death before an acknowledgement of a common destiny: 'It is time...'

A conclusion

At one level *Cry, the Beloved Country* is one of a genre of literature which examines the destruction of rural communities in general and the migrant labour system in South Africa in particular. It has a compelling narrative, interspersed with broken vignettes of contemporary issues which illuminate the social setting. The black and white world are almost entirely separate social fields, touching each other only in the Mission House in Sophiatown, in the court room, and in the unequal individual relationships of the countryside.'

Paton writes with the intensity of a Morality Play but combines this with, at times, an acute perception of place, colour, and individual character which is indicative of a literary technique. He displays great craftsmanship and a knowing ear in his ability to portray relationships between Africans, in understanding the sensibilities and internal world of the white and African.

But in the final instance Paton chose *Cry, the Beloved Country* to be a political statement: a warning to whites of what was to come, and a plea to blacks for understanding the white predicament. He projects the hope for individual, not social, reconstruction. In this article I have examined the social and historical context of the book, the man and his time. *Cry, the Beloved Country* was written in the interregnum between the falling away of whatever benevolence there was in the old form of segregation and the rise of modern apartheid. It was a time when commissions urging recognition of the need for definite reforms were ignored, when many of the small-scale initiatives such as the Pholela Clinic were allowed to decay, and when the liberals (like the Hofmeyr he admired) were beating a hasty retreat and losing power anyway. There was a preoccupation with a post-war political economy combined with a lack of decision. This was the still water between the turning of the tides.

As a political document in the short term the novel was a colossal failure, as the Nationalist Party government of 1948, in its vision of a completely segregated South Africa, acted to destroy every place of solace for Africans and whites committed to change.

As in the outpourings of his hero, Paton equivocates between the modification of the traditional and the radical impulse of a Trevor Huddleston. The return to the land is in one sense the failure of the liberal to confront the issues of the town. The main characters return to the countryside where the impulse to reform lies atrophied and civil society crushed by oppressive colonial-tribal relations.

Here lies the dark side of liberal imagination: what is missing is the penny whistle, Spokes Mashiyane, the comfort of friends, the dancing, maraba style, the excitement and vitality of the African township, the shebeens, the Trevor Huddleston jazz band, Hugh Masekela, the confidence and self-consciousness of the township working class which vainly penetrates the narrative, and the hard-headed vitality and resistance of *Mine Boy*. None of this is there, and Paton remains trapped within the moralism of the segregationists who saw nothing but death and destruction in African city life. The city with its great potential to intermingle, to encourage cross-currents, to absorb contrasts, to reconcile opposites, allowing for chance meetings and new departures and constituting the civil society for which Socrates would accept death rather than banishment, is a closed book to our author. But as a work of imagination and understanding, what does endure is a brooding awareness of the explosive possibilities of the accumulating social power of the black working class resistance:

In the deserted harbour there is yet water that laps against the quays. In the dark and silent forest there is a leaf that falls. Behind the polished panelling the white ant eats away the wood. Nothing is ever quiet, except for fools (164).

Hoemle, the mentor he adopts, was pessimistic about a change of heart among whites because there was not 'the will or the vision for planning and effecting this change'. He felt that change would be 'forced on us by world-forces and world-events over which humanity has little conscious control'.¹³ If change cannot come from above or by some conscious external intervention, it cannot come at all. And yet it has to come. This is the final enigma, the paradox which concludes the book.

Notes

1. p.38. All references to *Cry, the Beloved Country* are to the Penguin Edition.
2. Alan Paton, 1980. *Towards the Mountain: An Autobiography*. David Philip, pp.84-86.

3. Quotations are from John Steinbeck, 1973, *The Grapes of Wrath*. Penguin Books.
4. 'The Basis of Trusteeship in African Native Policy', SA Institute of Race Relations, 1942, quoted in H.J. and R.E. Simons, 1969, *Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950*. Penguin, pp.540-541.
5. *Towards the Mountain*, p.248.
6. *Towards the Mountain*, p.248.
7. This very abbreviated discussion of Hoernle is derived from the seminal article on liberalism and segregation by Martin Legassick 1976, 'Race, Industrialization and Social Change in South Africa: The Case of R.F.A. Hoernle'. *African Affairs*, 175 (299): pp. 224-239.
8. See Legassick. 'Race, Industrialization and Social Change', pp.237-238.
9. *Towards the Mountain*, p.243.
10. Agnes Heller, 1987. *Beyond Justice*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p.18.
11. Peter Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa*, p.47.
12. See J.S. Marwick, 'The Natives in the Larger Towns', Killie Campbell, Durban.
13. Quoted in *Towards the Mountain*, p.243.

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