

Article 8**An Onosmatic study of Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*.****Jean Bruno TOZAI, Ph. D**Maitre-Assistant de lettres anglaises
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tozaijb@gmail.com // jbtozai@yahoo.fr**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to deal with South African writings which came to international attention in 1948 with Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* through the study of the characters.

Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* is South African novel. A novel is defined as a relatively long fictional narrative. It may or may not be based on facts. Any novel has a particular organization. The literary value of a novel lies in its organization. It is important that the readers of *Cry, the Beloved Country* should gain a good knowledge of the characters in order to better understand the motives which are recurring structures, contrasts and literary devices that can help to develop and inform the texts major themes.

In order to create a successful story, Alan Paton convinced the readers that the actions and motives of his characters are those of living people. In Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*, there is neither a major nor a minor character. All the characters in this novel under consideration bear a special message or messages. Though some outstanding characters are used as specimens in *Cry, the Beloved Country*, one should bear in mind that it relates to us because we are well aware of injustice and struggle for freedom.

Keywords: *Fictional narrative, literary value, character.*

RESUME:

L'objet de ce travail est de traiter des écrits des Sud Africains qui ont attiré l'attention internationale en 1948, avec le roman d'Alan Paton *Pleure Oh Mon Pays Bien Aimé*, à travers l'étude de ses personnages.

Pleure Oh Mon Pays Bien Aimé par Alan Paton est un roman d'Afrique du Sud. Le roman se définit comme un récit imaginaire plus ou moins long. Il peut, comme il ne peut pas, être fondé sur des faits réels. Tout roman a son organisation propre. La valeur littéraire d'un roman réside dans sa structure.

Il faut bien que les lecteurs de *Pleure Oh Mon Pays Bien Aimé* puissent avoir bonne connaissance des personnages pour mieux comprendre les raisons qui apparaissent dans différentes situations, les contrastes et les techniques littéraires qui peuvent aider au développement et à l'information sur les grands thèmes contenus dans l'œuvre.

Pour bien réussir son récit, Alan Paton a tâché de convaincre ses lecteurs que les faits et les mobiles de ses personnages sont ceux des gens en chair et en os. Dans *Pleure Oh Mon Pays Bien Aimé*, il n'y a ni petit, ni grand personnage. Tous les personnages du roman à l'étude sont soit porteurs d'un message spécial, ou porteurs de messages. Quoique certains éminents personnages sont utilisés comme échantillons, l'on devra se remémorer que tout cela nous lie, car nous sommes tous bien conscients de l'injustice et de la lutte pour la liberté.

Keywords: *Récit imaginaire, valeur littéraire, personnage.*

Introduction

In education, narratives or stories have been used in two different ways: first, storytelling as a pedagogical strategy and second, narrative as a search method. So, South Africa, like other African countries with their history of settler communities, has produced significant English language literature for more than a century. Between 1948 and 1994, in the context of legalized Apartheid, the English language literature in South Africa was written both by white South Africans of British and Afrikaaner descent, and by black South Africans and those of mixed race. South African literature is one of the richest and most complex on the Continent.

Prominent white South African writers of recent years include novelist and poet Breyten Breytenbach's *Africa Even the Flies Are Happy* (1978); *True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (1984); *Memory of Snow and of Dust* (1990) and J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980); *Life and Times of Michael K.* (1983); *Foe* (1986).

Nadine Gordimer, the Nobel laureate of 1991, was also a writer of fiction. She published eleven novels and nearly as many collections of short stories. Her most recent fiction included the novels *Burger's Daughter* (1979), *July's People* (1981), *A Sport of Nature* (1987), *My Son's Story* (1990), and *None to Accompany Me* (1994), a first post-apartheid work, and the collection of short fiction *Jump and Other Stories* (1991).

While liberal white South Africans, by and large, have expressed the guilt, fear, alienation and general malaise of the white minority living under Apartheid, black and black-identified South African writers have written of the deprivation, injustices, violence, and anger suffered by the black majority. Their narratives are often set in the cities and townships. Among the earliest narratives of black life under Apartheid are autobiographical novels set in urban South Africa, such as *Mine Boy* (1946) and *Tell Freedom* (1954) by Peter Abrahams.

Stephen Kumalo

Stephen Kumalo is an old Parson from Ndotsheni. He goes to the city of Johannesburg to look for some members of his family who have moved there. His brother John, his sister Gertrude and only child Absalom have gone there and never returned to Ndotsheni. Kumalo

just travels to Johannesburg to help his sister recover from an illness. He gets on the train at Carisbrooke and goes straight to Johannesburg, one of the big cities in South Africa:

Kumalo climbed into the carriage for non-Europeans, already full of the humbler people of his race, some with strange assortments of European garments, some with blankets over semi-nudity of their primitive dress, though these were all women (Paton, 1948: 14-15).

The description of the black garments and the train Kumalo gets in can help the reader to have an idea of the South African country and how black people live in. Kumalo is right when he declares:

Some of us think when we have power, we shall revenge ourselves on the White man who has had power, and because our desire is corrupt, we are corrupted and the power has no heart in it. But most White men do not know this truth about power, and they are afraid lest we get it (Paton, 1948: 37).

Kumalo's attitude clearly shows that he hopes for a change in South Africa and hopes that White and Black men desire neither power nor money, but that they desire only the good of their country. He wants all the South African people to live together in order to work for their country.

Reverend Theophilus Msimangu

Reverend Theophilus Msimangu lives in the Mission House, at Sophia town, Johannesburg. He sends a letter to Reverend Kumalo asking him to come to Johannesburg because his sister Gertrude is very ill. He promises to make accommodation for Kumalo:

I have a place for you to sleep my friend, in the house of an old woman, a Mrs Lithebe who is a good member of our church. She is an Msutu, but she speaks Zulu well. She will think it honour to have a priest in the house (Paton, 1948: 21).

Kumalo is well treated at Lithebe's house thanks to Reverend Msimangu. Reverend Msimangu gives Kumalo much information about his family, and where his family lives. As he urged about Gertrude:

She lives in Claremont, not far from here. It is one of the worst places in Johannesburg. After the police have been there you can see the liquor running else, wherever you go in that place (Paton, 1948: 23).

Msimangu learns through Kumalo that the conditions in which Gertrude lives in are worse. This means that she knows a life of prostitution and becomes a seller of bad liquor. He is not “a man for segregation, but that is a pity that we are not apart” (Paton, 1948: 27).

Anyway, Msimangu hates the white man. He shows in what way Blacks and Whites could live in peace: “My friend, I am a Christian. It is not in my heart to hate a White man” (Paton, 1948: 25). These arguments by Msimangu prove that he is a true Christian and he hopes for peace not for segregation.

Gertrude

Gertrude is a specimen of what racial segregation could do to its victims. She is Kumalo’s sister. She is twenty-five years old, much younger than Kumalo. She has gone to Johannesburg with her little son to look for her husband who had never come back from the mines. Gertrude lives in Claremont that is one of the worst places in Johannesburg. She is “a liquor seller, a prostitute with a child and you do not know where it is” (Paton, 1948: 29).

Gertrude is a victim of racial segregation. She looks like an animal that is tormented. Thanks to her brother, Kumalo, she is taken to Lithebe’s house where she stays and is helping Mrs Lithebe in the house. Unfortunately, Gertrude refuses to return to Ndotsheni and runs away.

John Kumalo

John Kumalo is Stephen Kumalo’s brother. He went to Johannesburg and has a business of his own in Sophia town. Unlike Stephen Kumalo he has no use for the Church. He does not believe in God. As he said “what God has not done for South Africa, man must do it” (Paton, 1948: 24).

John’s attitude means that God is unjust and wicked, because He gives up the millions of Black men to suffering. So, the sufferings experienced by the Blacks are natural.

John Kumalo is one of the great Black politicians. He grows fat and looks like a chief. He is a man who fights for justice in South Africa. He makes criticisms against the exploitation of the Black men by the Whites. He argued:

We do not ask for what cannot be given. We ask only for our share of what is produced by labour. New gold has been found and South Africa is rich again. We ask only for our share of it. This gold will stay in the bowels of the earth if we do not dig it. This

gold will stay in the bowels of the earth if we do not dig it out. I do not say it is our gold. I say only that we should get our share of it (Paton, 1948: 24).

According to John Kumalo, gold found must be for all the people: the Blacks, the Whites, the Coloureds and the Indians because, “it is only our share that we ask enough to keep our wives and our families from starvation” (Paton, 1948: 24).

John Kumalo is not someone who hates the White man. He is very particular. He hates the racists and those who think that the Blacks are slaves who have no rights. As he added: “They forced us into the mines as though we were slaves. Have we no right to keep back our labour”? (Paton, 1948: 181)

This argument by John Kumalo proves that he hates no specific person but injustice. He strongly fights for justice and equality for all South Africans.

Absalom Kumalo

Absalom Kumalo is Stephen Kumalo’s single child. He has gone to Johannesburg to look for his aunt Gertrude and has never returned. He is a sample of what racial segregation can make of its victims. He stays at John’s house and was friendly with John’s son. These two children are ill. They go away to look for jobs:

He stayed with me, Umfundisi. We took pity on him because he had no place to go. But, I am sorry to tell that they took him away, and I heard that the magistrate had sent him to the reformatory (Paton, 1948: 58).

Absalom kills a White man at his residence in Parkwold. He and his two friends are called upon to plead guilty or not guilty. The Court finds Absalom guilty of the murder of the White man whose name is Arthur Trevelyan Jarvis. During the trial, the judge declares:

I sentence you Absalom Kumalo, to be returned to custody, and to be hanged by the neck until you are dead. And may the Lord have upon mercy upon your soul (Paton, 1948: 74).

As a matter of fact, the intention to kill is an essential element in murder. Thus, the Court finds him guilty and the two other children not guilty.

Arthur Trevelyan Jarvis

Arthur Jarvis is the only son in his family. He is a courageous young White man and a great fighter for justice. He is shot dead at his residence in Parkwold by an intruder:

At 1.30 p.m. today Mr Arthur Jarvis, of Plantation Road, Parkwold, is shot dead in his house by an intruder, thought to be a native (Paton, 1948: 65).

Arthur Jarvis is a man who believes in the fellowship between man and he wants it in South Africa. He believes that God endowed all men with various gifts. This means that the racists must explore this belief thoroughly as the General Assembly proclaimed in *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*:

as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction". <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>)

Jarvis is a true Christian. Unlike other White men, he believes in the fact that all men are endowed with different gifts:

We are therefore compelled in order to preserve our belief that we are Christian, to ascribe to Almighty God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, our own human intentions, and to say that because; He created White and Black. We go so far as to assume that He blesses any action that is designed to prevent Black men from the full employment of the gift He gave them (Paton, 1948: 134).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948, was clear specifically:

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty (Article 2).

It is clear here that the notion of equality is innate in any human being. Jarvis is right when he declared:

We said we withhold education because the Black child has not the intelligence to profit by it; we withhold opportunity to develop gifts because Black people have no gifts (Paton, 1948: 134).

Indeed, as it is said this Declaration,

(1) *Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.*

(2) *Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.*

(3) *Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children (Article 26).*

Mrs Lithebe

Mrs Lithebe is a woman with whom Kumalo stays in Johannesburg. She is a good and generous Christian who believes that helping other people is simply her duty:

I have a place for you to sleep, my friend, in the house of an old woman. It is cheap only three shillings and you can have your meal there with the people of the Mission (Paton, 1948: 21).

It is for Mrs Lithebe an honour to have a priest in her house. She treats everybody with courtesy and respect as it is claimed in *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*:

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty (Article 2).

Mrs Lithebe admires Kumalo for what he has done by saving Gertrude and her Child. Thus, Mrs Lithebe guides Gertrude to be a good woman.

Father Vincent

Father Vincent is an Anglican priest from England staying at the Sophia town Mission, and offering to help Kumalo in his troubles. He counsels Kumalo when he is broken hearted over his son and presides over the wedding between Absalom and Absalom's girlfriend. He is warm and understanding, he possesses deep faith.

Absalom's girlfriend

She is a kind-hearted and a quiet sixteen-year-old girl whom Absalom has impregnated. She has run away from her dysfunctional family, but she still seeks a family structure and bonds. She is sexually experienced but essentially innocent, obedient and grateful for adult protection.

Margaret Jarvis

She is James Jarvis's wife. Margaret takes the death of her son very hard. She is a physically fragile and loving woman who commiserates with, and supports her husband through their grief.

John Harrison

He is the brother to Mary Jarvis, Arthur Jarvis's wife. John is young and quick-witted, and shares Arthur's opinions about the rights of the black population in South Africa. He provides companionship to James Jarvis in Johannesburg.

Matthew Kumalo

He is John Kumalo's son. We know little about Matthew, but he is important in the plot of the novel, as he is a good friend and an eventual accomplice of Absalom. Eventually, however, Matthew denies having been present at the robbery scene, turning his back away from his cousin and friend.

Arthur's son

Although he is only a child, Arthur's son is very much like his father. He is curious, clever and generous. He treats black people with unusual courtesy and pleases Kumalo by visiting him and practicing the Zulu language.

Mary Jarvis

She is Arthur Jarvis's wife. Mary takes her husband's murder hard but she remains staunch for her children. She shares her husband's commitment to justice.

Mr Harrison

Mr Harrison has conservative political views, and blames black South Africans for the country's problems. Though he disagrees with Arthur, he admires his courage.

Johannes Pafuri

The third young man is present at the attempted robbery of Arthur Jarvis's house. According to Absalom's testimony, Pafuri is the ringleader of the group, who decides the time of the robbery, and has his weapon blessed to give them good luck.

Napoleon Letsitsi

Letsitsi is an agricultural expert. He is hired by James Jarvis to teach farming techniques to the people of Ndotsheni. The well-educated middle-class black man, Letsitsi earns a good salary and is eager to help build his country. Although he is grateful for the help of good white men, he nonetheless looks forward to future Africa in which black people will not rely on whites for their basic needs.

Dubula

He is the second person in a trio of powerful black politicians in Johannesburg. Dubula provides the heart to complement John Kumalo's voice. The bus boycott and the building of Shanty Towns are his handiwork.

The Judge

He is the specimen of those who do not have faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom as it is said in *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*:

(1) Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.

(2) No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed (Article 11).

The judge presiding over Absalom's case seems to be a fair-minded man, but he is constrained by unjust laws that apply strictly.

Conclusion

This article highlights Alan Paton's imaginative appropriation of South African history with a view to determining their political allegiances and commitment, that is, to say his political correctness or otherwise. It is argued that they are reworking the socio-political epoch

disrupting the categorization of South African Literature as purely sociological. It is also revealed that, while they are committed to critiquing Apartheid, he is equally interested in giving an alternative rendition of at issue.

It is established that Alan Paton is innovative writer, not just witnesses against the injustices of Apartheid. His works offer a deconstructive and subversive narration of the particular mode of discourse that emerged in the history of South African literature. Alan Paton's fictional approach in this novel offers an alternative interpretation of events in Apartheid South Africa, including social stratification, alienation, segregation and racial discrimination.

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