

# The beloved country

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Cry, The Beloved Country, a novel by South African Alan Paton, is the story of a father's search for his son, an experience which opened his mind to the prejudice and poverty prevalent in his country. As the story opens, Reverend Stephen Kumalo, is summoned to go to Johannesburg to help Kumalo's sister who was very ill. He goes to help his sister and also to look for a long-lost son, Absalom, who has gone to the city and never came back.

When Kumalo arrives at Johannesburg, he discovers that his sister has become a prostitute and that his brother, John, has become a politician. He visits his brother for help in locating his son and from him Kumalo learns that his son worked at the Doornfontein Textiles Company with John's own son years before. From the factory, Kumalo is forwarded to a couple of addresses until he eventually finds his son in prison. Absalom killed a white man, Arthur Jarvis, who was also a proponent and activist for racial equality.

Furthermore, he also meets a girl which Absalom got pregnant and would have married before he was sent to prison. Kumalo talks to his son and finds a lawyer for him. The second part of the novel shifts to the viewpoint of James Jarvis, the father of the murdered Arthur. The police inform him of his son's death and he flies from Ndotsheni to the city to attend his son's funeral. There he learns the activities of his son and sets out to continue his cause. He also meets Kumalo whom he has to comfort and forgive.

Absalom is found guilty of the murder and sentenced to death. Before Kumalo returns home to Ndotsheni, he marries his son to the pregnant girl and brings her and his nephew with Gertrude to the village. Back in Ndotsheni, he and Jarvis comes together to plan a way to help the village which at the time has been experiencing drought. The novel ends with

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Kumalo going up on a mountain on the evening of his son's execution. As the dawn breaks, he contemplates on his life, the blessings he has received, and of South Africa and its social problems.

How the novel relates to culture and values The novel takes a look at how elements in society, whether they are events or changing situations, affect the culture and values of a country. Cry, The Beloved Country explores how the social situations between the black and white races promote a culture of apartheid in South Africa, threaten the loss of the long-held values of the natives, and cause other social illnesses that plague the country even in contemporary times.

Paton uses the story of Reverend Kumalo to define the larger problems discussed in the novel. The most obvious of these is how the divisions among the peoples of South Africa have been causing a series of problems that threaten to destroy the entire country. The more affluent and privileged whites are claiming the lands which the black natives have long revered and cultivated. As a result, more blacks are leaving the countryside for the cities where they believe they could find more meaningful and better-paying jobs as workers in industries.

This results to a breakdown of the tribal system and the loss of previously strong-held beliefs and traditions. When these natives arrive in the city, they find that the situation is worse in that the urban areas themselves plague the black population with poverty and injustices. In retaliation, they commit violent crimes against the more privileged white people. The fear among whites against "native crime" and the hate of the blacks against "white

injustice" fuels a cycle of violence and further chaos for the whole South African country.

Yet, instead of being a pessimistic look at the situation, the novel would like to promote the values of kindness and cooperation among races to create change and a better future for the country. The friendship which evolves between Kumalo and the white Jarvis contains the author's sentiments of everyone coming together instead of fighting each other to solve the basic problems of both the countryside and the urban areas. Paton promotes the values of family and religion as means by which the lost values could be reclaimed. Reference Paton, Alan. Cry, The Beloved Country.