

Cry, the beloved country

Experience, Meaning of Life



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Jacqueline Carrillo April 21, 2011 Cry, the Beloved Country Cry, the Beloved Country, by Alan Paton, tells the story of Reverend Stephen Kumalo and his son Absalom and of their relationship as father and son. At the time the novel is set, many events are occurring: tribal societies are falling, urban cities are growing, and social injustices have become very common during this time. These events cause drastic changes in the lives of these two men and many other characters in the novel. Alan Paton has a recurring motif throughout the whole novel to help portray his themes more clearly, such motif is that of fear. Paton shows the readers that the people of South Africa fear of society and of the mysterious nature of life. Through the use of the motif of fear, Alan Paton is able to successfully demonstrate universal themes in Cry, the Beloved Country. In the novel, Paton very accurately describes the way urban cities and tribal societies clashed. His novel was historically accurate in that he incorporated apartheid, which was the law of the land at the time the novel was set. Apartheid kept the races separated, and did not allow for the races to come together and bring South Africa as a whole nation. In the novel, most black men avoided having to come in contact with the white folks, and when they did they were very serene in doing so. But as time went on and Africa became a black man's country under white man's law, people started to revolt and protest. This made the black people fear society as it was very unfair when it came to laws, and there was a sense of racism as well. There were boycotts and slowly crime rates started increasing. Fear was everywhere; through this fear Alan Paton was able to show the themes of the deterioration of tribal society and the fight for social justice. This fear kept the people apart, as Msimangu said: " 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" (70). Msimangu said this in regards to the white people's indifference to the black people and how that will eventually make the black people angrier at society. Msimangu was right because one not caring about another will not keep people happy. Fear kept the people apart, and Msimangu as well as society, wished it was not so. Another fear that Paton brought into play is the fear of life. It is very difficult to understand the underlying meaning of life. People question consistently what their purpose in life is and why certain things happen to certain people. Paton was well aware of this mystery and in *Cry, the Beloved Country* Stephen Kumalo is faced with many adversities, as his sister has become a prostitute and a bad mother, his brother does not care about religion, and he has just discovered that his own son has murdered a great man. Why these adversities happened to Kumalo is a mystery, which makes one wonder about the nature of life. Fear changes people, and the fear of society and fear of nature is enough to change the ideals of a person, as Kumalo was forced to grow up and try to accept the path the Lord had for him. Fear has the capability of destroying: " For fear impoverishes always, while sorrow may enrich" (94). Fear always changes one and can destroy the happiness of one as well. Instead of accepting the changes that were occurring in South Africa, people started to fear the changes, which is why it took them so long to adapt and accept the way life wanted it to be. " Sorrow" can be enriching because with sorrow there is still some humanity left in society, there is still a force out there that leaves one clinging on to life as one knows that it is not always full of " sorrow", making sorrow enriching as it makes the human

being much stronger. As a result of fear, one is left with nothing to look forward to as it “ impoverishes always. ” Fear has the ability to destroy people, or make them stronger. Towards the end of the novel, Alan Paton recognizes that there is a cure to this fear people have sometime. Fear causes people to grow apart, and it makes people to question the nature of life. The cure that can help with this fear can be found anywhere, making Cry, the Beloved Country an inspirational novel. When Kumalo is facing the death of his son Absalom he comes to realize that: “ such fear could not be cast out, but by love” (311). Love has the power to help people at their hardest times, which is what Kumalo needed to be able to surpass all these adversities thrown at him. The last line of the novel is very important because it comes to a sudden realization that fear will end and the human spirit will no longer be troubled. People anxiously wait for that to happen, a sudden rebirth of the human soul. Paton explains: “ But when that dawn will come, of our emancipation, from the fear of bondage and the bondage of fear, why, that is a secret” (312). Paton realizes that everyone will have their moment of salvation, the moment where the spirit will be free of troubles, reaching its “ emancipation. ” The human spirit will be free from the “ bondage of fear” and “ fear of bondage, ” meaning that the human spirit will be free from being influenced by fear and of the fear of being influenced by anything. Paton says that when this “ dawn” will come is a “ secret. ” It is a dawn because the earth experiences through dawn every day, it is something that will come for sure, so the moment the human race will be free of fears is sure to come, but when it comes is a secret. One can be sure that emancipation will come, just as dawn comes. These words are very

inspirational and make the troubles of fear seem acceptable one knows that there will be better things to come. Cry, the Beloved Country is a very inspirational novel set in the times when South Africa was separated with apartheid. Paton's novel adequately portrayed the lives of people as it showed the struggles the people of South Africa faced. Through his use of fear, Paton was able to successfully show the fears of society and the nature of life, but then gives inspirational words by advising that the fear is worthwhile as there will be better things to come and love can help with it all.