

Makhabane was still a boy at school when Chief Boshokane died, and so his mother, Ma Makhabane, became the regent. It was soon clear that Ma Makhabane had no desire to relinquish the regency. Nkuebe could not get her to name a date. Whenever he went to see her, she was ill, or she had to go elsewhere urgently. She demanded that her son should marry before he succeeded, and she demanded that he should marry a girl of her choice. When he decided to choose his own wife, she drove back the dowry cattle. It seemed that power was driving her mad.

And indeed it was so. She decided on a terrible course. She, aided by accomplices, decided that a man named Mocheselo must be drugged, and that parts of his living body, his lips, his tongue, his throat, must be cut out, so that those taking them for medicine might have the gift of speech and power and honour. Mr Jingoos writes "The other details of how Mocheselo was cut I do not want to talk about. He was related to me, and beloved of everyone, especially of the Chieftainship and of his uncle, Pholo." The story is made more terrible by the knowledge that it was Pholo who cut out his nephew's tongue. While Mzimukulu was cutting flesh for the Chieftainess, Ma Makhabane prayed: "Oh mercy, Mother Maria, for you know I am committing a sin, but I am doing this because I want to be known. I pray to Thy Holy name, that You do not count this as a sin, because I want to keep the Chieftainship of Mats'ekheng . . ." The author relates this terrible story without dramatic devices, and indeed it needs none.

For this crime fifteen were accused. Two were discharged. Eleven were sentenced to terms ranging from 7 to 15 years. The Chieftainess and a man Rachakane were hanged.

The story does not end there. There were in fact too many chiefs, and the British Government got the Paramount Chief to reduce the numbers, an agreement which weakened the traditional nature of the chieftainship, and the long tradition that a chief is a chief by the people, and not by the grace of any government or any other chief. This weakening of the

chieftainship again had terrible consequences in the 'Forties. In spite of the execution of the Chieftainess and Rachakane, others turned to ritual murder and the use of human flesh for magic purposes to retain their power. Parents would not allow their children to go out after dark. People began to fear their chiefs. Many were hanged, including two of the most senior chiefs, Bereng Griffith and Gabashane Masopha.

The ritual murders further weakened the Chieftainship. Mr Jingoos writes: "The chiefs were not wicked or bad men; they were insecure men, who turned to the supernatural in an attempt to resist losing their rights." One cannot help noting that Mr Jingoos refrains from any outright condemnation of the means employed. His main criticism of ritual murder is not that the murderers regarded human beings—their fellow Basotho, in fact—as means to their ends, and seemed to think they had some right to kill and mutilate them—it was that the murders weakened the Chieftainship, and estranged the common people. The conflict between Christianity and the tribal culture goes deep, and only exceptional people can resolve it. Mr Jingoos is not one of them.

It is not so much the belief in the continuance of the ancestors; many parts of the Christian church have such a belief. Nor is it the practice of seeking the intercession of the ancestors, for the Roman Catholic Church practices something like it. Nor is it the invoking of the help of the supernatural, for Christians do the same. It is rather—in Mr Jingoos—a strange reluctance to question the moral nature of the supernatural powers, and the moral nature of the means employed by humans to gain their favour.

The book has this moral ambiguity, but as a work of literature it is superb. Not only is Mr Jingoos to be congratulated, but so also are John and Cassandra Perry, who saw the possibilities of the story of the nation founded by the great Moshoeshe. I do not know much about the literature of Lesotho, but this book must be a valuable addition. □

## GETTING UP THERE AGAIN

A review of Alan Paton's *Knocking on the Door: Shorter Writings*, selected and edited by Colin Gardner (David Philip, Cape Town, 1975—R9,50)

Reviewed by Tony Voss

**realpolitik** of various kinds and political idealism of other kinds. The recent trial of Breyten Breytenbach has already threatened an estrangement between Mr Paton and NUSAS, and what appears as a kind of intransigence in him may in fact be a characteristic attempt to adhere scrupulously to his principles. It is chastening to think of Paton and Breytenbach as writers in society—the doyen of South African English writers and the young avant-garde Afrikaner: both had achieved critical acclaim and popular recognition, some would say for non-literary reasons; both had suffered, either restriction to South Africa or exile from South Africa, for what must be both political and personal reasons. But perhaps the nature of Afrikaner society has made it impossible for Breytenbach to keep the poet and the citizen in himself together: Afrikaans in South Africa has a literary society which English lacks, but it may be that very fact that helps to make Alan Paton a more popular writer and a freer man.

**Knocking on the Door** suggests that Alan Paton has had occasion to scrutinise his liberal principles, to test them against his Christian faith on the one hand and the realities of South Africa on the other. Thus, for example, in a piece called 'Under Threat of Arrest', Mr Paton wrote in 1962:

The Minister has declared that Liberalism is more dangerous than Communism. Communism kills, he says, but Liberalism leads one into ambush in order to be killed. What the Minister means is that anyone who opposes the Government is—wittingly or unwittingly—furthering the aims of Communism. Anyone who advocates change is preparing the way for Communism. I am not prepared to stop advocating change.

The words of the Minister are echoed in the closing lines of a poem written eleven years later, an elegy for four South African black policemen killed in action in the Caprivi Strip in 1973:

I saw a new heaven and a new earth  
for the first heaven and earth had passed away  
and there was an end to death  
and to mourning and crying and pain  
for the old order had passed away.

Is that what you died for, my brothers?

Or is it true what they say  
that you were led into ambush? ('Caprivi Lament')

One may be reminded of Yeats:

Did that play of mine send out  
Certain men the English shot? . . .  
Could my spoken words have checked  
That whereby a house lay wrecked?

Or perhaps the last question of 'Caprivi Lament' is directed at the Minister?

In September 1944 Alan Paton, who was then Principal of Diepkloof Reformatory for Africans, addressed the National Social Welfare Conference on "The Non-European Offender." Mr Paton spoke with the authority of an educator and penologist and from what Professor Gardner here calls "a professional and scientific interest in juvenile delinquency"—and the address still carries something of the

weight of such authority and such interest. But, characteristically, it acknowledges beyond these the authority of the people and the interest of the citizen—"The greatest bulwark of the law is the opinion of the people." "The most important control is public disapproval." And this is from the final paragraph of that address of thirty years ago:

. . . it is not money and expenditure that will buy us immunity from crime and criminals. Just as a prison will become quieter and more controllable as it grants significance to its prisoners, so will society become quieter and more controllable as it grants significance to its members. Significance is more than mere social and economic independence; it implies a mutual relationship, and give and take. And as man is freed to give his talents, his brains, his vigour, to his country, so less and less will he be attracted by evil. If a man is not free to fulfil his nature, then he will defile his nature. This is the dilemma of European South Africa, that it is afraid to let men defile their natures, and equally afraid to let them fulfil them. It is courage, even more than money, that we need.

What can be traced in **Knocking on the Door**, I believe, is Alan Paton's transformation of the liberal social philosophy of that address of 1944 through a liberal political philosophy into a liberal stance which has both political and social implications but whose basis is ultimately religious. It is as a writer that Mr Paton has attained the widest audience and the greatest authority, and even though, as he acknowledges in his "Interview with Myself", **writing and doing** may be at variance, it is difficult to think of Mr Paton's imagination and his sense of duty existing in any other than the symbiotic relationship they share in his best work. As William Plomer wrote in 1955, seven years after the publication of **Cry, the Beloved Country**, "Alan Paton's experience of reformatory administration has been of capital importance for South African literature."

**Knocking on the Door**, though, should be enough to enlighten readers, if there still are any, who think of Alan Paton only as the man who wrote **Cry, the Beloved Country**. Here Professor Gardner has gathered together and edited with great tact twelve stories, thirty-two poems and twenty-nine miscellaneous pieces (essays, speeches, meditations) which have hitherto either been unpublished or only appeared in the more fugitive pages of newspapers and magazines, anthologies or academic series. The volume reflects a great variety of mood and occasion: hope, defiance, regret; political and religious gatherings: but there is a real sense of growth in these fifty years of a writer's life, from the N.U.C. student of 1923 to the man of great moral authority in South Africa, and for South Africa in the world, that Alan Paton is today.

The editor has arranged the book chronologically in four sections, the crucial dates being 1948, when the National Party came to power and **Cry, the Beloved Country** was published; 1953, the date of the founding, and 1968, the date of the suppression of the Liberal Party of South Africa. Perhaps not surprisingly it is the period 1948–1953 that yields the most fiction and verse (4 stories, 21 poems), and although there are 5 stories from the period 1953–1968 (but only two poems), there is only one story (not, in my

view one of the best) in the final section, and only two poems, both elegies. But the volume as a whole does not suggest that either Mr Paton's imagination or his way with words or his hope is flagging. Alan Paton's turning, if it is a turning, from fiction to fact (from **Cry, the Beloved Country** and **Too Late the Phalarope** to **Hofmeyr** and **Apartheid and the Archbishop**) will be read by some as the submission of a powerful but waning imagination to the uses of political sentimentalism. But the two biographies strike me as highly individualistic and useful works, not subject to the criticism which Mr Paton levelled at Albert Luthuli's autobiography, **Let My People Go** in 1962: "this artistic and dramatic deficiency, or alternatively, this emotional austerity and modesty" which "deprives us of much of the **feeling** of some of these events". Perhaps it is not idle to wonder what Mr Paton could have made of a biography of Luthuli, who is the subject of two of the pieces reprinted by Professor Gardner, and who is remembered in the title of the volume. As it is, the two biographies may be seen as Mr Paton's attempt at the enterprise which is the subject of one of Serote's best poems: "I want to look at what happened."

In an address delivered in the United States in 1949, called 'Why I Write', Alan Paton refers to his "one book whose reverberations and consequences still continue to astonish me": twenty-five years later, speaking in Durban, he acknowledged that **Cry, the Beloved Country** "continues to sell a six-figure total every year." Surely such a book must be achieving the purpose which he describes in one of the poems reprinted in **Knocking on the Door**:

my quite revolutionary plan  
To write so that the common man  
May understand.  
(*'My Great Discovery'*)

The impression one gains is that Mr Paton has tried to write as clearly as possible for as many people as possible.

Of the stories, those that have an autobiographical ring are usually among the best ('The Gift', 'The Magistrate's Daughter'). But in the third section of the book (1953–1968) there are two very moving and precise stories, less obviously autobiographical, assured in tone and clear in evocation: 'The Hero of Currie Road' and 'Sunlight in Trebizond Street'. I wonder if the latter is the story that Mr Paton referred to in an interview with the **New York Times** in 1966:

What Mr Paton says he would like to do now is "to write a story about 1964"—the blundering efforts at sabotage by young activists, their imprisonments, the interrogations, the treachery of their friends, the trial, long sentences and the broken relationships that resulted.

A few of the stories strike me as confused ('The General') or condescending ('Bulstrode's Daughter'), and the handling of the South African setting of 'The Perfidy of Maatland' seems awkward.

In an address on 'The South African Novel in English' Mr Paton refers to the incident that suggested another story, also reprinted here, 'The Quarry' (1966):

It is life, not any structural pattern, that is the making of any story. And life in South Africa is so fantastic, so deep and wide and rich, that it shows no signs of being exhausted . . . A small black boy finds himself marooned on a quarry-face, and is brought to safety by a brave white man, who is greeted on descending by a great crowd, mostly Indians and Africans, who cry out to him, 'Thank you, sir. God bless you, sir. White man, God bless you.'

In the story that, his editor implies, Mr Paton made out of this incident, the situation is altered—a small **white** boy finds himself marooned on a quarry-face and his life "for all we know" is saved by a young black man. This is evidence, slight perhaps but telling, that the writer's imagination does impose a "structural pattern" on, or find that pattern in "life" to make a story. Mr Paton's racial reversal here does not qualify the story's truth to life, but it does give the incident new and legitimate symbolic and social implications. 'The Quarry' seems to me a good story much better than the earlier 'Bulstrode's Daughter'—(1948, not previously published), which reads like testimony and does not escape a certain smugness in its treatment of race.

Mr Paton's best poems, like his best stories, achieve a great deal in their clarity and simplicity:—relying on good English syntax and the rhythms of the speaking voice, he can write poems of humour, of anguish, of compassion. It is perhaps the poems in **Knocking on the Door** that will come as the greatest surprise to readers unfamiliar with the range of Mr Paton's writings, but they will also be gratified by the critical wisdom and insight in the half-dozen of so essays on literary topics.

More than half of **Knocking at the Door** is given to articles, speeches, meditations, reminiscences; Mr Paton speaks as educator, politician, Christian—and there are many ways in which one could approach this selection from fifty years of thought, where one can trace the development of a style of plain speaking, attaining great power, conviction, insight and poise. It is perhaps significant that, although among the more recent items there are essays on Roy Campbell and Gatsha Buthelezi, the last essay in the book is on 'The Nature and Ground of Christian Hope Today', since Mr Paton's Christian faith, trying to work in the world and in South Africa, is the theme which seems to me more and more to control these writings, just as a dominant influence on his style is the Bible. But it is Mr Paton's achievement as a writer from and to and about South Africa that strikes me in these discursive pieces. The South Africa of which Mr Paton writes, that land of fear and courage, that land of which Roy Campbell and Luthuli and Karel Schoeman (whose novel **Na die Geliefde Land** Mr Paton reviews in an essay reprinted here) are fellow-countrymen, is clearly a land, at least partly, of the imagination: but for all that it is no less a reality to be lived and striven for. Beside Mr Paton's South Africa, so many other South Africa's seem spurious: the decomposing plastic of 'South Africa Mirror' on our cinema screens; "Lion Country"; the misshapen land that figures only on maps of Apartheid. Mr Paton's, I believe, is a South Africa worth working for. □