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A memorial to Dorrie

**KONTAKION FOR YOU
DEPARTED**
BY ALAN PATON
(Cape 25s)

Readers of Alan Paton's *Kontakion for You Departed* will discover some astonishing things. They may possibly be as dumbstruck at the outset as those in the audience at Rhodes University who recently heard him read extracts from it obviously were.

He had told them: "This

keep intimate things so close to yourself as you did when young." Then, having explained that "kontakion" meant a hymn for one departed, Paton began to read in sharp staccato, unemotional tones from this work composed as a memorial to his wife, Dorrie, who died on September 23, 1967, of terminal emphysema.

Shocked, embarrassed silence, speaking of disbelief, gradually relaxed as the work's range of mood, humour and movement

ent in kind, but comparable in stature to Paton's two most successful works: the novel *Cry, the Beloved Country*, and the biography *Hofmeyr*.

Its form is simple but effective. It consists of brief, numbered passages alternating in time. The first treats the parting at death, while the second recounts their first meeting on the tennis courts at Ixopo: she a married woman full of laughter and mischief, who smoked cigarettes, and he a shy "clear-eyed virgin" of 22 who neither smoked nor drank. Thereafter the even numbered passages move forward in chronological time, from the joy and pain of young complicated love, through the years at Diepkloof Reformatory, to common commitment to the work of the Liberal Party—a spiritual progression countering the loss of youth and physical vitality.

The odd numbered passages remain in the present, and treat immediate events at the time of writing, including the demise of the South African Liberal Party and even what people say about the *Kontakion* so far. The arrangement supports the theme of the book: that while the past may be recalled, it cannot be relived.