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Alan and Doris Paton

By Alvin Beam, Book Editor

Alan Paton's *For You Departed* (Scribners; \$5.95) can be read, I suppose, in a quarter the time one might have spent on "Cry, the Beloved Country," the lyric, troubled novel of his native South Africa that made its author famous at once in 1948. But the new book, short as it is, is no less a literary accomplishment, and I have already read it twice. I shall read it again.

This book, too, is lyric. It is an account of his marriage — from first wild yet diffident, impossible thought of it to the death of Doris Paton 42 years later—, cast in the form of recollections

and meditations addressed to the departed in passages varying in length from a single ordinary paragraph to several pages. There are 68 of these, numbered and shifting backward and forward in time. They hold together. They make up, in fact, a complex short novel.

THE ENGAGEMENT began inauspiciously, with built-in handicaps. Alan Paton was teaching at a high school near Doris's home in Ixoi when he first met her. He was 22 and "virginal and shy." She was 28 and married, with an assured, mature, lively, captivatingly mischievous air. But her

husband died a few months later and within months thereafter Alan had spoken and been accepted. They were married two years later but she continued to wear her first wedding ring. She could not love Alan, she had said, as she had her first husband.

But these two people drew remarkably close in the years of marriage and this book is a celebration of those years, with all the hurts and differences suggested as well as all the joys.

It is the story too of their comradeship, of her valiant support of him, in his dangerous struggle for racial decencies and equality in South Africa — these still go on, as the book itself attests — and of Alan Paton's success and then ultimate defeat by the government in penal reform at Diepkloof Reformatory, where they spent more than a decade of their life, Alan as principal.

THERE ARE compelling passages on the internal agonies of the Liberal party (Paton served as its national chairman from the beginning in 1953 until its suppression in 1965) when some of the young in it turned to violence as the only hope against a racist government in the early 1960s. There is a complex, immensely moving passage on one man's tortured acts of betrayal.

Much of the book's beauty lies in the constant presence of Paton's deep Anglican religious devotion. There is art of a high sort in his combining this with respectful, painful awareness of the philosophies of doubt. I can hardly believe that anyone, now, will manage such a fusion any better.