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By Linda Keister Howe

FOR YOU DEPARTED. By Alan Paton.
Scribner. \$5.95.

Alan Paton's wife, Dorrie, died of emphysema in October, 1967. This book is his long thank you note to her for marrying him. It is also an elegy, written in Paton's hieratic prose, and a memoir whose moral reads "love pays for the pain and the suffering."

As I began to read "For You Departed," I became uncomfortable. Here, I thought, are the sincere effusions of a man sunk by his grief. I began to wonder whether he had not invaded his own privacy.

But as I read on, my hesitations began to fade. Paton conquers with simplicity. His unwonted devotion is made admirable by a fearful pride in this love. He sketches the relationship's course in fiercely written vignettes that jump back and forth from past (courtship and marriage) to present (her long dying and her death). He runs an emotional gamut of grief, excitement, humiliation, love, and pain.

The book is explicitly intended as a portrait of Dorrie. Yet, written as it is with deep personal involvement, its greatest success lies in conveying Paton's personality. He is the mirror upon which she is reflected; and to me, the mirror is more interesting.

It is a willfully egotistical view of their love. He apologizes for his intentions, praises her for her actions; but he will not speculate on her motives and reveals her thoughts only when he quotes from her diary. This is the respect of a husband for the privacy of his wife's mind. A respect that, when joined to the deeply subjective narrative mode, dooms his portrait to relative failure. We read it as autobiography.

Mixed with his love is his religion, his faith in the essential goodness of God; and mixed with his religions are his politics, his faith in the essential evil of apartheid. Towards the end of the book, glimpses into his public life occur more frequently.

Shortly after his marriage, he was appointed principal of the Diekloof Reformatory for delinquent African boys. His hesitations at the prospect were quickly replaced by shock and disgust. He found the "prisoners" treated more like animals than boys. Whole dormitories were locked-in for 14 hours a day, 20 to a room with one bucket of water and one bucket for their waste. The stench set him to prison reform. He "freed" the boys, built banks of lavatories, and became known as the man who replaced the fence with geraniums. He was 13 years at Diekloof.

Then came the book that changed his life, "Cry the Beloved Country." Its success determined him to retire to a literary leisure. But he soon became dissatisfied with inaction and returned to politics of reform. Of this there is too little said. Like shadows beyond the scope of this book rise the Liberal Party, the increasing repression of the South African government, and his own friendships across the barrier of race. Were he to turn to autobiography, it would make an extraordinary story.

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for a publishing firm.*