

On location in Ixopo

The filming of Cry, the Beloved Country in 1950

‘There is a lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills. These hills are grass-covered and rolling, and they are lovely beyond any singing of it.’ These lines, the famous opening sentences from Alan Paton’s novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, have been hand-painted on to a large boulder that can be found in the grounds of Carisbrooke School.

This rural primary school with 218 pupils and eight teachers was founded in 1911 and is situated in the Carisbrooke valley about 10 kilometres outside Ixopo. Its red corrugated-iron roofs are shaded by a row of mature gum trees, themselves dominated by Mount Nyeza. The school has close associations with Paton’s novel as it was one of the locations for the film version of the book shot in 1950 and released in 1951 which starred Canada Lee, Charles Carson and Sidney Poitier.

With the help of production stills featuring younger versions of the gum trees, headmaster Dan Shoba pointed out a building used in the film. Though not alive at the time, Shoba recalls the filming with gratitude. ‘After they made the film God has been on our side. First the film-makers donated a building.’ This structure was once a church, but now houses a classroom and a library. A plaque on the wall announces: ‘This building is the remembrance [*sic*] of the taking of the film ‘Cry the Beloved Country’. Below are added the names of Zoltan Korda and Alan Paton. ‘They organised the building and builders,’ says Shoba.

That was in 1950. More recently a group of tourists from Norway donated three computers to the school. ‘Then tourists from Atlanta, Georgia, in the United States, donated books to the library. The school is really benefiting from tourism.’

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Zoltan Korda, director of the film, was one of the three famous Korda brothers, Hungarian émigrés who had settled in London in 1930. Vincent was an art director while the flamboyant Alexander, the most influential of the three, is generally acknowledged as the saviour of the British film industry with the creation of London Films and the building of Denham Studios.¹

Zoltan had directed *Sanders of the River* (1935), *The Four Feathers* (1939) and *The Jungle Book* (1942) for his brother but had been living and working in Hollywood since 1943. According to Alexander Korda’s biographer, Charles Drazin, the two brothers worked together only once again and that was ‘on a film of (Zoltan’s) own choosing, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, from Alan Paton’s anti-Apartheid novel, a subject that contrasted markedly with the Imperial epics which Alex had him direct in the course of the 1930s.’

Cry, the Beloved Country was published at the end of January 1948 by Charles Scribner and Sons of New York. On 2 March 1948 Alexander Korda offered Paton a mere £1000 for the film rights of the book that had stormed up the bestseller lists and made international headlines on its publication.

The book, to which the film is faithful, tells the story of a humble black priest, the Reverend Stephen Kumalo, who leaves his impoverished rural parish near Ixopo to go to Johannesburg in search of his son Absalom and his sister Gertrude. He finds his sister has turned to prostitution and Absalom has murdered Arthur Jarvis, the son of Ixopo farmer James Jarvis. Absalom is convicted and sentenced to death while Kumalo returns home with Gertrude's son and Absalom's pregnant wife. The novel ends with the reconciliation of Kumalo and Jarvis.

The success of the novel provided Paton with financial security and he resigned as principal of the Diepkloof Reformatory, near Johannesburg, to concentrate on writing. Paton and his family moved to Natal, renting a house at Anerley on the south coast. In August 1949 Paton flew to London to work on the script with Zoltan Korda. He had wanted to go with his wife Dorrie but 'she felt she should be near our twelve-year-old son Jonathan.'²



Alan Paton and Zoltan Korda on the set of Cry, the Beloved Country
 (Photograph: Alan Paton Centre)

Paton was granted a brief audience with Alexander Korda who lived in the penthouse suite of Claridges Hotel. 'The great man gave me extravagant praise for *Cry, the Beloved Country*, and at the same time gave me the powerful impression that it would be dangerous to offend him. Zoltan and I adjourned to the big room where we were to work together for some weeks.'³

Zoltan first told Paton that he would be credited for the script but Paton had no desire to become a script-writer, 'and I had no confidence that I would be any good at all at it. Zoltan brushed my objections aside. He would construct the script. I would just have

to write it. So I yielded, and became a kind of superior amanuensis.⁴

As recorded by Paton it was an odd liaison. One morning the preoccupied Korda requested “something about nature, Alan. I want something about nature.”

‘Then he would say apologetically, “I know the first chapters are full of nature. But I want something – one line maybe – about small nature.”

“Something about a flower?”

‘His face lights up, as though I have said something extremely creative.

“That is it,” he says, “a flower.”

‘I was later to learn that in the studio he could be moody and arrogant, but in our script room he was very humble.

‘You are the writer,” he says. “That is why we pay you. I am not a writer.”⁵

Another writer, John Howard Lawson, also played a role in the screenplay though he was unacknowledged due to having been blacklisted as a communist in the United States as a member of the ‘Hollywood 10’.⁶

During his stay in London Paton enjoyed being wined and dined by Korda who regaled him with stories of his early life in Hungary. On some of these outings Korda ‘would invite Zuzhi, a beautiful young Hungarian who worked for London Films.’⁷

Not that Paton was lacking for female company. His correspondence with Mary Benson, secretary to film director David Lean, that had begun when she wrote Paton a fan letter in 1948, had become an intimate one. They met for the first time in London and quickly became lovers. Paton’s biographer, Peter Alexander, records ‘a strange, desultory affair that began as a physical relationship but soon became a warm friendship, continued over many years, whenever Paton and Mary Benson had the opportunity of a meeting.’⁸

Paton and Korda worked together on the script until October when Paton went to New York for the final rehearsals and premiere of *Lost in the Stars*, a stage musical version of *Cry, the Beloved Country* adapted by Maxwell Anderson with music by Kurt Weill.⁹ After an extended stay in the United States Paton returned to South Africa on 21 January 1950.

Earlier that month Korda also came to South Africa. ‘I’ve come out for personal background,’ he was reported as saying in the *Natal Witness*. ‘I want to visit all the places Paton mentions in his book.’¹⁰

Korda was also looking for ‘six Native actors. They must, however, be able to speak “superb” English – broken English will not be good enough. As a last resort, he said, he would recruit American Negroes.’¹¹

According to the *Natal Mercury* this statement ‘caused great resentment among Natal’s educated natives who feel that had London Films’ agents given the various centres time to collect likely players – a few people were only notified last Friday – the 8 000 000 Africans in the Union could quite easily provide the full cast.’¹²

The 70 people who turned up for auditions at the Bantu Social Centre in Durban were quickly whittled down to 30 and of these Korda selected four for film tests: ‘jaunty Muriel Paul, a 29-year-old lady’s maid marked for the naughty girl Gertrude; beefy Elijah Cele, a 30 year old school teacher, visioned as the agitator John Kumalo; short, excitedly spoken Reginald Ngcobo, a court interpreter who is trying for the taxi driver Dhlamini; and rich-voiced Alfred Assegai Kumalo, a 71 year old retired manager, who is aspiring to the leading character Umfundisi Stephen Kumalo.’¹³

Korda was aided in the selection process by his assistant Roger Madden. ‘Mr Korda spent a straight five hours to three o'clock – with a break at lunch for a cup of tea - testing people. He looked first for looks and stature, listened carefully for correct English voices and finally gave reading tests.’¹⁴

The *Natal Mercury* recorded that Korda then left for Pietermaritzburg to continue his search there. ‘Later he will visit Adams Mission, Fort Hare, various Native schools in Johannesburg and a number of institutions with likely players.’¹⁵

Before leaving Durban Korda announced that ‘a lot of the filming will be done at Ixopo, the “home” of the story, where the country has been described as ideal for picture-making. Many shots will be in Johannesburg and there will be others in England. The whole production will take about six months.’¹⁶

On 25 February 1950 Paton flew to London and spent nearly a month working on the script. Mary Benson assisted with the typing. During this time Korda seems to have travelled between London and South Africa at least one more time. Leaving Johannesburg on May 19 he told the press he had ‘taken film tests of more than 100 natives for parts in the film.’¹⁷

Of these, the earlier mentioned Reginald Ncgobo was successful in becoming the taxi driver.¹⁸ Other South Africans cast in minor roles include Albertina Temba as Mrs Kumalo, Ribbon Dhlamini as Gertrude and Berdine Grunewald as Mary Jarvis.

The key role of Absalom, the Reverend Kumalo’s son, initially intended for Sidney Poitier, went to Lionel Ngakane, a young Johannesburg journalist. He also worked as an advisor to Korda during the filming, thereafter working as his assistant in England where he became an actor and director.¹⁹

The American Canada Lee, a former boxer, whose career had ended as a result of an eye injury, was cast as Reverend Kumalo and the British character actor Charles Carson as farmer James Jarvis. Like the writer John Howard Lawson, Lee had also been blacklisted and prevented from working in Hollywood.²⁰

The 26-year-old Sidney Poitier was thought more suitable to play the Reverend Theophilus Msimangu who guides Reverend Kumalo through the Johannesburg town-



Sidney Poitier, Ben Moloi (Head teacher, Diepkloof Reformatory), Alan Paton, Canada Lee during the making of the film Cry, the Beloved Country in Johannesburg
[Photograph: Alan Paton Centre]

ships in the search for his son, Absalom. This was Poitier's second film, following his debut in the racial conflict drama, *No Way Out* (1950). Other overseas black actors in the cast were American Charles Macrae as the old priest's friend, and Vivien Clinton, an English resident of West Indian parentage, as Mary, the wife of Absalom.

The presence of overseas black actors in the South Africa of 1950 proved problematic. 'The accommodation of white actors from overseas presented no problems,' recalled Paton. 'But where were the black actors to stay?'²¹

Paton's brother-in-law Garry Francis, whose farm *Rayfield* was close to the Carisbrooke location, came to the rescue and London Films built an extension to his farmhouse to accommodate Lee and McCrae. Paton later expressed his admiration for his brother-in-law and his wife Doreen for agreeing to this arrangement. 'They had never had a black person to the house except as a servant. It is almost one hundred per cent certain that no white farmer in the whole Ixopo countryside had ever had a black guest, nor any white resident in the village of Ixopo.'²²

Vivien Clinton was put up at the Plough Hotel in Ixopo, who agreed 'to accommodate her in a caravan in the hotel grounds and feed her "from the table."²³

'Zoltan was extremely solicitous for her, and indeed for the two black male actors as well, and ensured that they would not be neglected during the weekends. They were taken to Pietermaritzburg and Durban, and were made a great fuss of in both cities.'²⁴

Poitier was not involved in any of the scenes shot at Ixopo, only joining the unit when it moved to Johannesburg and rented 'a kind of country mansion some miles from the city, where the actors ... lived in solitary splendour.'²⁵

Rayfield was also used as a location and, according to journalist Aida Parker, this decision resulted in a 'big alteration in its appearance.'²⁶

'The farmhouse was constructed of natural stone, but Korda explained this was too dark and would not photograph well. He persuaded Mr Francis to have it painted cream, with the roof a light, bright red. He undertook that his company would restore it to its former colours when shooting was complete.'

'The Francis were a little startled by the effect at first, but they have now decided they like it. So *Rayfield* will keep its red-and-cream coat.'²⁷

On July 26 the *Natal Witness* reported that the 'little Methodist Native Church and Mission School at the bottom of the Carisbrooke Valley' was to be the location for Kumalo's church and parsonage. Additional huts were built and the shell of a house erected to represent the parsonage. This was done under the eye of Wilfred Shingleton, the Oscar-winning art director of *Great Expectations* (1946), who acknowledged that it would not have been built without the help of Ixopo farmer A.G.S. Harley.²⁸

Three huge marquees were erected nearby to act as a temporary church and school for the community, who were also financially compensated for the inconvenience.

At the service on Sunday July 30 the congregation were informed of the arrangements. 'As soon as the service was over, the Rev. S.P. Rundle, Methodist Minister at Ixopo, told the Natives: "I have come to see you this morning on special business. The company making this picture has drawn up an agreement and later it will be read to you. The people have come here to make it from England and have come 6,000 miles."²⁹

Agreement was obviously considered a given as during the service 'while the congregation rendered unaccompanied their beautiful hymns in harmony' a cable was

being laid from a mobile generator to 'carry 66,000 volts to the giant arc lamps which will be erected round the little settlement.'³⁰

As per the agreement £25 would be given for the repair of the church, also the headmaster's house would be repaired and fifteen new benches supplied for the school.

'The congregation asked several questions, after which they gathered outside, talking excitedly about the arrival of the visitors. They were very satisfied with the arrangements.'³¹

Shooting began on August 1 with Australian cinematographer Robert Krasker behind the camera.³²



Making 'rain' for the storm sequence in Cry, the Beloved Country
[Photograph: Alan Paton Centre]

Krasker was fresh from his Oscar win for *The Third Man* (1949). His impressive credit list includes *Henry V* (1945), *El Cid* (1961) and *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964).

According to production manager Jack Swinburne, everything went satisfactorily. 'All the South African artists are exceptionally good and have splendid talent,' he said, going on to explain how, after the day's shooting, the exposed film was couriered to Durban and then flown to Johannesburg for processing. It was then returned to Ixopo and projected in the agricultural hall to check for any defects.³³

The first week was spent shooting scenes in the interior of Kumalo's house and on Friday of that week the unit shot one of the 'biggest scenes'³⁴ at Carisbrooke Siding. Many locals, among them Mr and Mrs Francis, were used as extras and local farmers were recruited for the scenes shot at the small railway station to portray European passengers ostensibly setting off for Johannesburg.

'The tiny, doll-like narrow gauge train remained at Carisbrooke two days for the benefit of the film-makers. This did not upset train schedules for the area, for this train only runs over the Carisbrooke line every three days.'³⁵

As well as appearing as extras local farmers also had a hand in solving some of the technical problems facing the film-makers. 'Korda wanted big supplies of water for the storm sequences ... the farmers recommended damming the tiny Incalu stream. Today

a reservoir containing 15,000 gallons stands ready in the valley.³⁶ A spraying machine was hired from Umzimkulu farmer D.D. Collett to generate the rain from the dam.

Local Africans were also recruited as extras. ‘Every day hundreds of curious men, women and picannins pour in from the surrounding kraals to watch the unit at work. Quite a few of them are used for crowd scenes. Those without speaking parts get 4s. a day – double the rates paid to part-time workers in that area In addition, all Native extras get their food and ten cigarettes each.’³⁷

‘Those playing definite roles are paid handsomely. Albertina Temba, a welfare worker with the Pretoria City Council, who is playing Kumalo’s wife, is getting £163. Twelve-year-old Iris Ntensha, a Native schoolgirl who plays the child, gets £25; the thief, a two-day part, gets £25; and the miner on the train £7 10s for a day’s work.’³⁸

According to Paton ‘Zoltan presided over this fascinating and in some ways unreal world like some kind of impish god. He had his own chair and no else dared sit in it. I had my own chair too, and so did the leading actors.’³⁹

‘The inhabitants of Nokweja (the Ndotsheni of the novel), the small black “location” adjoining my brother-in-law’s farm watched the comings and goings of the film company with wonder. Most of them knew what a film was, and many had been to see one or more of them, but in 1950 they were among the few black people in South Africa who had ever seen a film being made.’⁴⁰

Describing the station shoot the *Natal Witness* reported that Korda ‘wanted an old Native woman to stand on the station. Eugenie Dyido was fetched from Johannesburg and rushed to Ixopo.’⁴¹

‘At midday . . . it was discovered that the Native passengers in the coach of the train did not have any cigarettes or sweets. As it was usual for Natives to smoke and munch during a journey, Mr. Korda sent to Ixopo for supplies.’⁴²

Visiting the set a reporter from the *Natal Witness* found Korda to be ‘an indefatigable worker . . . who had not shaved for three days yesterday, often works from early morning until midnight.’⁴³

‘Canada Lee told of the care Mr Korda took with detail. He described how he had been “shot” walking up a road in a tattered parson’s uniform. He had on a pair of shoes that had been “treated” to make them look old.’⁴⁴

‘Mr Korda was not satisfied. He considered that the attempt to batter them about had not succeeded. A Native was quickly found, his old shoes taken, and a pair of new ones handed over in exchange.’⁴⁵

The *Natal Witness* also described how Korda had scrapped three days of shooting and re-scheduled the scenes ‘because Mr Korda is not satisfied that the best results have been obtained.’⁴⁶

Aida Parker recounted a day spent shooting an interior scene in Kumalo’s house nineteen times: ‘At the end of it, Korda announced to his weary actors and technicians that he did not like what had been done and there would have to be a retake next day.’

‘At dinner that night, I commiserated with one of the staff. He shrugged, said philosophically: “That’s nothing. In Britain I have seen him order 38 re-takes – then scrap the scene.”’

Parker described Korda as a ‘most likeable friendly man. He has a stubborn dislike of putting on airs, and is known as “Zollie” to almost everybody on location. In appearance, he resembles an untidily attired tramp. His trousers are usually baggy and

his face unshaven. Yet he has an excellent excuse, for he very often works a 17-hour day, starting at 6 am and finishing his last conference at 11.'

Korda is a 'great stickler for detail,' wrote Parker, noting how in one sequence Charles McRae was supposed to be carrying a heavy suitcase. McRae insisted he could 'make believe the case was heavy without weighting it.' However Korda insisted that only weight would pull the shoulder down correctly. 'He instructed the case be filled with rocks. By the end of the day McRae was ruefully examining a blistered hand.'

Korda's eye for detail extended to costume. 'Canada Lee's clerical garb was bought from an African padre who had had many good years service from it. To give it a finishing touch, the wardrobe people ironed it several times without a cloth, giving it a high polish. They also ripped it in several places, then neatly darned the holes. Now it has the look of threadbare respectability Paton had in mind when he created the character of the *umfundisi*.'⁴⁷

The worn-out clothes worn by Kumalo's friend played by McRae had been bought from a pedestrian who Lee and McRae had passed on the road. They at first only wanted his hat but then realised his suit was just what they were looking for. 'They rushed the astonished fellow off to an outfitters, bought him a new ensemble from head to toe, and gave him 10s. for his trouble.'⁴⁸

Lee told Parker that 'by this time the poor chap was certain he was dealing with two screwies, but who was he to argue with such benevolent madness?'

Despite their care Korda's eagle-eye homed in on Lee's shoes. 'Suddenly, after two hours of shooting, Korda noticed Canada was wearing new shoes.' Assistant directors were busy 'ageing' the shoes when Korda spotted an onlooker, Rupert Bhengu, 'wearing some battered old boots' and asked him if he would like to swap them for some new ones. 'Rupert could not understand it, but took off his old shoes, grabbed the new ones – and was off over the veld before Mr Korda could repent his bad bargain.'⁴⁹

Parker asked Lee what he thought of South Africa. 'Surveying peaceful farmhouses on the surrounding hills, he said: "This is certainly not as I heard about it. There is not a lion, tiger or head-hunter in sight!"'

Lee was equally misinformed about the weather, finding it colder than he expected. 'They also told me Africa was one of the hottest countries on earth. I brought shorts and open-toed shoes. For these cold mornings it would have been better if I had brought my long woollen underwear.'⁵⁰

On occasion the impish Zoltan could 'exhibit the ferocity of his brother Alexander' though it was not long before Paton learned Korda was less than omnipotent. 'His technical crew were members of a trade union and led by a difficult and not impressive man who knew the rights of workers and who felt, even in this remote part of the South African countryside, the might of the unions behind him. Zoltan was torn in two between his perfectionist ideals as a film director and his democratic respect for the rights of labour. I have seen him more than once denied the privilege of the five-minutes' overtime that would have enabled a particular sequence to be completed. In such cases the impishness disappeared and he would listen with inscrutable countenance to the fiat of the union leader of the crew.'⁵¹

Paton considered Korda 'had one fault as a director. There were times when he, in the hearing of all, belittled the work of one or other of his actors. He began to develop a dislike for Canada Lee, and unfortunately the dislike was tinged at time with contempt. Canada was not the brightest of men, and it was said that the batterings he had suffered

as a boxer were the cause of this. Zoltan would not have spoken to Poitier as he spoke to Canada, but life had knocked the fight out of the ex-boxer, and he received Zoltan's criticisms with pained smiles.⁵²

However Paton noted that Korda 'with that sense of propriety that was one of his most attractive characteristics, made it his business to invite the local chief, the minister of the church, and the headmaster of the school, to see how a film was made. When the filming at Ixopo was done, it was announced that London Films would build a new church to replace the one in which much of the action took place. Gifts of blankets and clothes and food and children's sweets were given most generously, and Zoltan left Ixopo in a blaze of glory.'⁵³

Korda left later than originally planned as two days of rain in early September had delayed the filming schedule. 'We went out to Carisbrooke yesterday and became bogged twice,' (reported production manager, Jack Swinburne). 'All the transport was stuck in spite of having chains on the wheels. We all had to walk from the farm back to the village and must have looked a real, bedraggled army.'⁵⁴

Swinburne added that the 'actual filming was going splendidly. Mr. Korda was still requesting retakes.'⁵⁵

'We have done thousands of feet of film but are only just scratching the surface of the book out here,' he said. 'We shall be in Johannesburg for eight weeks.'⁵⁶

The unit left Ixopo for Johannesburg on 20 September and the bulk of the film was shot in and around Johannesburg with additional studio footage being shot in London.

In his autobiography Paton recorded the viewing of the film's first cut in London: 'The film was shown in the small theatre at 146 Piccadilly, the headquarters of London Films. There were perhaps a dozen of us there, maybe more. But I can name only four of them with certainty, the three Korda brothers and myself. The theatre was darkened and the film began. The little girl is running to the church with a letter for the priest, the *umfundisi*. He is not used to letters and hardly dares to open it, "for once such a thing is opened, it cannot be shut again". The letter is from a priest in Sophiatown, Theophilus Msimangu, who writes to Kumalo to tell him he must come to Johannesburg because his sister Gertrude is "very sick". Kumalo is terrified at the idea of going to Johannesburg. It is not only terror of the big city, but where is the money to come from?'

'The only money they have is what he and his wife saved to send their son Absalom to St Chad's, but Absalom too has gone to Johannesburg, and has never come back. Kumalo compensates for his fear by speaking harshly to his wife, but she has now taken the matter into her own hands. He must go to Johannesburg tomorrow. So one of his faithful friends carries his bag to Carisbrooke, a small wayside halt where, by courtesy of the South African Railways, a small narrow-gauge train is waiting. It is all very beautiful, very humble, and a little bit sad.'

'Suddenly the lights of the theatre at 146 Piccadilly are turned on. Sir Alexander is on his feet. He turns to his brother and speaks to him in tones of barely controlled ferocity. "When does your film start," he says. "When does your film start?"'⁵⁷

Thereafter 'Zoltan spent endless hours cutting, splicing, pondering, viewing and reviewing... he speeded up the opening scenes, but not by much. For him the film of *Cry, the Beloved Country* was to be some kind of tragic and poetic idyll, whereas Sir Alexander wanted more action.'⁵⁸



Alan and Dorrie Paton with Zoltan Korda at the premiere of Cry, the Beloved Country
[Photograph: Alan Paton Centre]

The world première of the film was held in Durban and the proceeds from it were donated to a charity of Paton's choice - a tuberculosis settlement established in the Valley of a Thousand Hills by Toc H Southern Africa in December 1950.

A 'second world première – if there can be such a thing – was held in Johannesburg.' Guests of honour were Prime Minister D.F. Malan and his wife. Paton sat next to Mrs. Malan 'and we had to look at some fairly harrowing pictures of the black slums. At the interval she said to me, "Do you really think that Johannesburg looks like that?" I said to her, "Mevrou, I have lived thirteen years of my life among scenes like that."⁵⁹

Paton records that 'the film of *Cry, the Beloved Country* was not a financial success. Beyond the thousand pounds that my agent Annie Laurie Williams got for the rights, I received very little money. Perhaps Sir Alexander was right after all. It was an idyll that didn't come off.'⁶⁰

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Over fifty years later the visit of the Norwegian tourists to the Carisbrooke location and the donation of the computers to the school provides a pleasing symmetry as it was in a hotel in Norway that a homesick Paton sat down to write the opening paragraphs of *Cry, the Beloved Country*.

The visit by the Norwegians was organised by Paton's son Jonathan, who runs Alan Paton Tours. 'There were 26 Norwegian school teachers from a leading school in Norway,' says Paton. 'We tailormade a trip for them that included sites associated with my father – including Soweto, Diepkloof, Sophiatown, Ixopo, as well as Maritzburg and Eshowe.'

At Ixopo the tourists travelled on the small railway at Carisbrooke that has been restored by Julian Pereira of Paton's Express Adventures. 'We stopped at the point where you can look over the valley described in the opening of the book,' recalls Paton, 'and

read out the passage looking over the hills that are “lovely beyond any singing of it.”

‘They were intrigued by this sentence and got out the Norwegian translation to compare it. In Norwegian it reads “lovelier than any song.” It’s difficult to render the biblical poetry of the book into another language.’ Even, as Zoltan Korda discovered, the language of film.

This is an expanded and revised version of an article first published in the Natal Witness on 31 March 2003.

NOTES

1. ‘There have been many British film producers, but none have possessed that peculiar combination of power, personality and imagination that made Sir Alexander Korda – born in a remote village on the Great Plain of Hungary – Britain’s only movie mogul. He was the one British producer that the moguls in Hollywood took seriously, for in his extravagant sense of showmanship, his buccaneering spirit, his willingness to take risks on a massive scale, they recognised him as one of their own. They were even rather in awe of him. Over a quarter of a century, in movies like *The Four Feathers*, *The Thief of Baghdad* and *The Third Man* he showed himself to be their equal in producing polished box-office entertainment, yet at the same time he possessed a sophistication and style they knew they could never match. He represented the point at which two great cinema traditions met. He had made films in Hollywood many times, as one of the five stakeholder members of United Artists he had sat at the same table as the movie legends Chaplin, Pickford, Fairbanks and Goldwyn; but he had also directed films in Budapest, Vienna, Berlin and Paris, and had introduced to the English-speaking world such classics of European cinema as *Les Enfants du Paradis* and *Rome, Open City*.’ Charles Drazin, *Korda, Britain’s only movie mogul* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 2002), p. xiii.
2. Paton, Alan, *Journey continued* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1988), p.17
3. *Ibid.* p.18.
4. *Ibid.* pp.18–19.
5. *Ibid.* p.19
6. John Howard Lawson (1894–1977) was a founder member and first president of the Writers’ Guild of America. In 1947 his writing came under the scrutiny of the House Un-American Activities Committee. Lawson and several others, referred to as the ‘Hollywood 10’, were subpoenaed to appear before the Committee, and answer questions on their political affiliations. Lawson and the rest of the ‘Hollywood 10’ refused to answer any questions, citing the Fifth Amendment. Lawson was later sentenced to a 12-month prison term, fined \$1 000 and blacklisted by the studios. He moved to Mexico in order to continue working as a writer. He worked on two screenplays: *Cry, the Beloved Country*, for which he received no credit and *The Careless Years* (1957) written under the pseudonym ‘Edward Lewis’. He died in 1977. In 1997 the Writers’ Guild of America restored writing credits to twenty-three films whose writers had received no credit as they had been blacklisted. Among them was Lawson’s credit for *Cry, the Beloved Country*. More detailed information can be found at <http://members.rogers.com/hollywood10/johnlawson.html>. I have been unable to find any documentation as to the nature of Lawson’s contribution to the script of *Cry, the Beloved Country*.
7. Paton, p.19.
8. Alexander, Peter F., *Alan Paton* (Oxford: University Press, 1994), p.246. Mary Benson was born on 8 December 1919 in Pretoria, South Africa, and was educated there and in Great Britain. Before the Second World War she was a secretary in the High Commission Territories’ Office of the British High Commission in South Africa. Between 1941 and 1945 she joined the South African women’s army, rising to the rank of Captain and serving as Personal Assistant to various British generals in Egypt and Italy. After the war she joined UNRRA and then became personal assistant to the film director David Lean. In 1950 she became secretary to Michael Scott and first became involved in the field of race relations. In 1951 she became secretary to Tshekedi Khama, and in 1952, together with Scott and David Astor, she helped to found the Africa Bureau in London. She was its secretary until 1957 and travelled widely on its behalf. In 1957 she became secretary to the Treason Trials Defence Fund in Johannesburg. She became a close friend of Nelson Mandela, and assisted with smuggling him out of South Africa in 1962. In February 1966 she was served with a banning order under the Suppression of Communism Act and

she left South Africa for London later that year.

In London she continued to work tirelessly against apartheid, writing to newspapers and corresponding with fellow activists in South Africa. In April 1999 Mandela visited her at her home during his state visit to Britain and later that year an 80th birthday party was staged for her at South Africa House.

Mary Benson died on 20 June 2000.

Among her writings are *South Africa: the struggle for a birthright*, *Chief Albert Luthuli*, *The history of Robben Island*, *Nelson Mandela: the man and the movement*, the autobiographical *A far cry* and radio plays on Mandela and the Rivonia trial.

Source: Institute of Commonwealth Studies internet site: http://www.aim25.ac.uk/cgi-bin/search2?coll_id=4588&inst_id=16

9. A film version of *Lost in the stars* was released in 1974. Directed by Daniel Mann and starring Brock Peters, Melba Moore, Raymond St. Jacques and Clifton Davis. Another film version of *Cry, the Beloved Country* was released in 1995. Directed by Darrell James Roodt, scripted by Ronald Harwood and starring Richard Harris, James Earl Jones, Charles S. Dutton and Vusi Kunene. This featured scenes shot at Hilton Station and in the central Drakensberg. Peter Davis in his book *In darkest Hollywood: exploring the jungles of cinema's South Africa* (Randburg: Ravan Press, 1996), and, incidentally, dedicated to Mary Benson, also mentions another film version 'the very odd Morocco/Senegal, Guinea co-production *Amok* (1982), directed by Ben Barka Souheil, with Miriam Makeba, which does not even credit Alan Paton. (In view of the grotesque distortion of the original, it is probably just as well).' Davis's book contains an insightful discussion of the 1951 version. See page 38 et seq.
10. *Natal Witness*, 9 January 1950.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Natal Mercury*, 18 January 1950.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Natal Witness* 20 May 1950.
18. Reginald Ngcobo went on to become a 'successful lawyer, and later still a wealthy real-estate dealer.' Paton, p.44.
19. Lionel Ngakane lived in Britain from 1950 to 1994. He declined a role in the 1995 version of *Cry, the Beloved Country*.
'In 1950 the film version of Alan Paton's novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, made an exile of a promising Johannesburg journalist. Zoltan Korda, the producer and director, had refused to grant interviews to journalists while auditioning actors for the film. Lionel Ngakane, on an assignment for *Zonk* magazine, gained access to Korda by joining the queue of aspirant actors. When asked to audition, Ngakane confessed to the ruse. Korda, instead of rejecting the journalist, had him prepare for a screen test. Within months he had been engaged as Korda's assistant, was given the responsibility of choosing locations and, ironically, casting local actors. When Sidney Poitier's role was altered from that of Absalom to that of the priest, Korda cast Ngakane as Absalom,' the University Orator, Professor Mervyn McMurtry, at the conferment of the degree of Doctor of Literature, Honoris Causa, upon Lionel Ngakane, Faculty of Humanities Graduation Ceremony, University of Natal, Durban, 22 April 1997.
From 1950 until his return to South Africa in 1994 Ngakane worked mainly in Britain as an actor, writer, director and producer. He wrote and directed the short film *Jemina and Johnny* in 1962 dealing with racial tensions in London. This won first prize at the Venice and Rimini Festivals, and a bronze award at the Festival of Carthage. A founder member of the Pan-African Federation of Film Makers he was instrumental in organizing the first African Film Festival at the National Film Theatre in London. In 1985 he produced the documentary film *Nelson Mandela*. He was technical adviser on the film version of Andre Brink's novel *A dry white season* (1989).
Since his return in 1994 Ngakane has been a member of the government's Reference Group to prepare the White Paper on Film Policy. He has also been active as a director of and advisor to the Newtown Film and Video School, serves on the board of the Film Resources Unit, has been Chairman of the M-Net Film Awards selection committee, been elected to the board of directors of the South African Cinema Foundation, and a member of the Advisory Committee on Cinema for Africa '95 in Britain.
20. Canada Lee was born Lionel Canegata in New York on 3rd March, 1907. He attended school in Harlem but at the age of fourteen he ran away to be a jockey at Saratoga. After growing too heavy he became a boxer and eventually won the national amateur lightweight title. In 1926 he turned professional and

adopted the name Canada Lee. He was a leading contender for the welterweight championship, but a detached retina forced him to retire from the ring in 1933.

After a spell leading his own band, Lee became an actor with the Harlem YMCA, an organization subsidized by the Works Progress Administration. In 1936 he won critical acclaim as Banquo in the Federal Theater's Negro production of *Macbeth*. On Broadway he played Othello, Kid Chocolate in *Body and Soul*, and Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*, a play based on the novel by Richard Wright. The *New York Times* described his performance as 'the most vital piece of acting on the current stage.'

Lee moved to Hollywood and appeared in *Keep Pinching* (1939), *Farmer Henry Browne* (1942), *Lifeboat* (1944), *Body and Soul* (1947), *Lost Boundaries* (1949) and *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1951).

After the war the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) began an investigation into the Hollywood motion picture industry. The HUAC interviewed 41 people who were working in Hollywood. These people attended voluntarily and became known as "friendly witnesses". During their interviews they named several people who they accused of holding left-wing views.

One of those named, Bertolt Brecht, an emigrant playwright, gave evidence and then left for East Germany. Ten others: Herbert Biberman, Lester Cole, Albert Maltz, Adrian Scott, Samuel Ornitz, Dalton Trumbo, Edward Dmytryk, Ring Lardner Jr., John Howard Lawson and Alvah Bessie refused to answer any questions.

Known as the 'Hollywood 10', they claimed that the 5th Amendment of the United States Constitution gave them the right to do this. The House Un-American Activities Committee and the courts during appeals disagreed and all were found guilty of contempt of Congress and each was sentenced to between six and twelve months in prison.

Those named were also called before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Some refused to answer questions but others, such as Richard Collins, Budd Schulberg, Elia Kazan and Lee J. Cobb, named others who were fellow members of left-wing groups. If these people refused to testify and name names, they were added to a blacklist that had been drawn up by the Hollywood film studios. Lee, who had been a member of left-wing groups, was one of those actors named as a communist.

Lee refused to testify and was blacklisted. Lee's name also appeared in the pamphlet *Red channels*. This listed 150 people working in Hollywood who were known to have been involved in anti-HUAC activities. The American Tobacco Company threatened to remove its sponsorship of television shows unless Lee and other people mentioned in *Red channels* lost their contracts. Unable to find work he called a press conference denying that he had ever been a member of the Communist Party. However, unwilling to testify before the HUAC, he remained blacklisted.

Canada Lee died of a heart attack on 9th May, 1952. Only forty-five years old, his family and friends claimed that the stress brought on by McCarthyism was a major factor in his early death.

Source: <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAlleeC.htm>

21. Paton, p.41.
22. *Ibid.*, p.42.
23. *Ibid.*, p.42. Such treatment was not peculiar to apartheid South Africa. In 1936 Robert Adams, a West Indian actor and former teacher, came to Pietermaritzburg for the location filming at Otto's Bluff of *King Solomon's Mines* based on the novel by H. Rider Haggard. Cast as King Twala he 'agreed to take the trip to South Africa, although he had been warned of conditions there,' according to the film's publicist Bertha Slosberg. 'It was the most depressing aspect of the unit's stay in Natal to find how the colour bar was put into operation. Adams had a room in the [Imperial] hotel – in itself an unheard of departure – but he could not join the others for meals in the dining room. He wisely stacked his room with books on Bantu law, and the history of the Union, and made the most of his enforced confinement.' Bertha Slosberg, *Pagan tapestry* (London: Rich and Cowan, 1940), p.255.
24. *Ibid.*, p.42.
25. *Ibid.*, p.43. Though Sidney Poitier was not involved in any of the scenes shot at Ixopo he appears to have been present at some stage of the filming. Loveday du Tertre, who lived in Ixopo as a child, visited the set with an autograph book which was signed by various members of the cast and crew, including Poitier. I have been unable to find any other record of his presence there.
26. Parker, Aida, 'I watched the filming of *Cry, the Beloved Country*', *The Outspan*, September 8, 1950. Parker (1918–2003) 'began her career in journalism with the Argus group, publishers of *The Star*, and from there moved to *The Citizen* where she wrote a regular column which reflected her conservative political views.
'Parker was a determined personality which often brought her into conflict with the equally strong and determined *Citizen* editor Johnny Johnson.

'In April 1985 she launched the Aida Parker newsletter which was distributed on a subscription list around South Africa and the World and she was actively involved in its production up to the time of her death.' South African Press Association obituary, 24 February 2003.

27. Ibid.
28. *Natal Witness*, 5 August 1950.
29. *Natal Witness*, 31 July 1950.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Paton dates filming as taking place in May, an error of memory duplicated by Alexander in his biography of Paton.
33. *Natal Witness*, 2 August 1950.
34. Ibid.
35. Parker.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Paton, p.42.
40. Ibid., p.43.
41. *Natal Witness*, 5 August 1950.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Parker.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Paton, p.43.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
54. *Natal Witness*, 6 September 1950.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. Paton, pp.48–49.
58. Ibid., p.53.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid., p.54. 'American distributors infuriated Korda by changing the name of the film to the inappropriate title *African Fury*, which effectively cut off any mental association with the book, and implied a totally different character for the film, changing it to the jungle genre.' Davis, *In darkest Hollywood*, p.44.

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