Unlike Cry, The Beloved Country which as the author claimed is his autobiography was the result of a creative process, most of which had taken place unconsciously, the next novel Too Late The Phalarope was inspired by an incident which occurred in a country town in the Transvaal Province. A white policeman was charged under the Immorality Act\(^1\) and found guilty. The incident is recounted in Journey Continued:

"The story in itself was not unusual. What moved me deeply was that the policeman's wife sat in court throughout the trial, and by her demeanour showed that she had forgiven him. There was also the implication that when he was discovered, he had confessed to her. Acts of infidelity are as common in South Africa as in any country in the world, and such acts of forgiveness are also not unknown. But the
forgiving of a white man and especially an Afrikaner - by his wife when the act of infidelity had been committed with a black woman has an emotional and moral quality that is unknown in any other country in the world.

The Immorality Act passed in 1927 and amended in 1950 caused a lot of social damage but failed miserably to achieve its object. As if to prove its monumental failure, there is a legend in South Africa that the Cape coloured people are the descendants of Malay, Khoikhoi, San and passing soldiers and sailors. Researches have shown that close on 50 per cent of those who break this law are white men. When a white man is charged under this Act and he is found guilty, his life is ruined forever. Therefore some white men even commit suicide rather than face their trial. People then begin to ask which is the greater offence: to commit the sin of the flesh or to destroy the man who commits the sin. Critics also point out that the application of the Act "entails snooping, tale bearing and other disreputable methods of law enforcement. Policemen shine torches in stationary cars at night and enter private houses 'servants' quarters on suspicion." The policemen themselves face a lot of temptation. A solitary policeman on night duty may be tempted to seduce or coerce an attractive black or coloured woman who may be in one of the detention cells. Some policemen yield to the temptation, others lead strict sexual lives while others, fanatically believing in white purity and white identity would go to
any length to expose any of their colleagues who had violated the Act. The protagonist in Too Late The Phalarope offends against the Immorality Act and is exposed by one of his colleagues. Love, remorse and revenge are the main ingredients in this haunting and disturbing novel.

Though not quite so famous as Cry, The Beloved Country, Too Late The Phalarope was selected as Book of the month in the United States. It explores the effects of the Dutch laws concerning inter-racial relationship on one hand and the Dutch Reformed Church's doctrines and practices on the other. As an interpreter of the history of South Africa, Paton has brought into focus a dilemma that is too painful as it is its own creation. Human nature being the same everywhere, the iron law merely acts as a whip by which many are scourged and broken. The enormity of guilt and terror that torments an Afrikaner for having broken this iron law forms a larger part of this novel. The destruction of the van Vlaanderen family is told by Sophie who as the narrator and commentator is also an integral part of the novel. In the course of her narration, she has interjected portions of Pieter's confessions from the 'Secret book' which he had written while in prison. Those confessions which are revealing of the nature of the dilemma raging within the protagonist will be reproduced here at various points to support and strengthen our arguments.
Our first introduction to Pieter van Vlaanderen is through his Aunt Sophie. She, who has known and loved him all through his life claims that even as a child Pieter had always been two men. One part of him was strong-willed and manly while the other was tender and gentle as a girl. This is not to say that Pieter is a split personality. Far from it, in fact, he is endowed with all the qualities that makes one a man. Contrary to Sophie's thinking, it would have been a cause for worry if he had only been one or the other. The root of his destruction lies not in himself but with his parents, especially his father. He has written about them in his 'Secret book':

"... with a father and mother such as I had, one strict and stern, and the other tender and loving; for one I could never openly have disobeyed, and the other I could never knowingly have hurt. My father had a code about women, as strict and stern as himself, and once I had heard him say, in a company where I was by many years the youngest, that he had never touched a woman, other than his wife, nor had he ever desired to do so".

Pieter feels pride and respect for his father but wonders how he himself is so different from him. He grows up to be a brave soldier winning awards and medals for fighting in the war. Incidentally, his father, a staunch Afrikaner dismisses his medals as 'foreign trash'. He has no respect for the English. Pieter is also a great rugby player, idolised by thousands of boys and men. But there is also another side of him that is silent and grave,
brooding with a 'secret-knowledge' of himself. He projects a sombre and cold exterior to mask his fears and weaknesses. The reason for this duality is given by him in his 'Secret book':

"Then I thought I had perhaps been too obedient as a boy, too anxious to please and win approval, so that I learned to show outwardly what I was not within...

But perhaps when you were too obedient, and did not do openly what others did, and were quiet in the church and hard working in the school, then some unknown rebellion brewed in you, doing harm to you, though how I do not understand." 5

The harm that was done to him was that he became afflicted with the 'mad-sickness'. If he had been free as the other children were free, if he had taken part in light-hearted pranks and boyish escapades, it is possible that the black moods would never have bothered him. But discipline and restraint has brought in their wake a strange and sinister result. The 'mad-sickness' which disgusts and frightens Pieter and which eventually destroys him is the direct result of his upbringing. He offends against the Immorality Act not so much because of lust as the inevitable climax of his inner rebellion. It began when he was fourteen years old. His father took away his much loved stamp collection because he had not done his examination satisfactorily. Pieter did not protest what he obviously considered a great injustice. But he suffered and rebelled deep inside where no one could reach
or touch him. What Pieter so desperately needed but was so hopelessly denied was a father's affection and understanding. Jakob van Vlaanderen had taken pains to discipline his son but he had never tried to develop a relationship with him based on warmth and companionship. How starved Pieter is, for paternal affection, is revealed on two occasions. The first time is when Captain Massingham, his superior, touched him on his shoulder, shaking him softly and said, 'Pieter, it's time you went home'. Pieter, who had been coping with the smallpox disease that had broken out in Maduna's country was tired and weary. The worry and the stress (he has offended against the Immortality Act) added to his tiredness and he pretended to be asleep. "Now, the Captain never called him by his name, nor did he ever touch a man. Therefore, when the captain called him by his name and touched him, as some fathers touch their grown sons and as some do not, and because he was weary unto death and full of misery, therefore, he was moved in some deep place within and something welled up within him that if not mastered, could have burst out of his throat and mouth, making him a girl or child. Therefore, he could not speak nor lift his head nor stand."

The second time is when the father and the son go to the pan to look for the Phalarope. 'Jakob almost at once spots the bird. "Then because the son could not see, the
father went and stood behind him, rested his arm on his son's shoulder, and pointed at the bird. But the son could see no bird, for he was again moved in some deep place within, and something welled up within him that if not mastered could have burst out of his throat and mouth, making him a girl or child. Therefore, he could neither see nor speak. Even a light touch and a casual gesture moved Pieter and tears blur his vision because they indicate a caring and an affection. He has learnt to bury his vulnerabilities and present only the brave and gentle front. But his early deprivations has left an emotional scar which cannot be erased even in later life. Therefore, when Jakob takes his son to the pan to look for the phalarope and later brings stamps worth thirty-two pounds for his birthday, it is already much too late to repair the damage.

As a young married man, Pieter transfers his hunger for love to his wife. For a time, in the early days of his love, he feels happy and whole. But again, it is his misfortune that his wife regards the love of the body as something sinful and ugly. She does not understand until it was too late that what her husband had wanted and needed from her was the reassurance of love expressed through the body. In her innocence and simplicity, she had mistaken this love for a physical desire which any self respecting person ought to shun. Her dilemma is pathetic. She knows
what her husband wants from her but she does not know what it is connected with the black moods. She religiously prays for the removal of the black moods and for her to be a better wife, never knowing that she herself withholds the answer to her prayers. Pieter's confessions in the 'secret book' about this misunderstanding is touchingly regretful:

"And I wanted to cry out to her that I could not put the body apart from the soul, and that the comfort of her body was more than a thing of the flesh, but was also a comfort of the soul, and why it was I could not say, and why it should be I could not say, but there was in it nothing that was ugly or evil but only good."

For Pieter, the love of the body, the mind and the soul are the same thing. When he and his wife love each other, a feeling of wholeness and strength permeates his being and drive away the anger and the black moods. Nella does not know how vital her love is for her husband. With her misguided idea that the love of the body is apart from the love of the soul, "and had a place where it stayed and had to be called from, and when it was called and done then it went back to its place, and stayed till it was called again, according to some rule and custom", she denies Pieter what otherwise would have been his salvation. She is neither a prude nor a tease. Her love for Pieter is real, but sadly, she lacks what in today's society would be known as sex-education. Perhaps this ignorance is accounted for by her fiercely protective father.
Pieter is filled with the mad-sickness that shocks and torments him. All that is refined in him recoils with horror and loathing at himself. He is filled with longing to tell someone, to confide and purge his misery. He envies his brother Frans, the young dominee Vos and the constable Vorster for their open faces that hides no secret and no darkness. But ironically, these same men hold him in such high esteem, he cannot come down from the pedestal where they place him. But ultimately Pieter falls down like a great golden statue with feet of clay. A young coloured girl, with a child whose father was unknown, well-known to the police for her illicit brewing of liquor induces Pieter to break the iron law. In her more experienced way, she recognises the 'mad-sickness' in Pieter and offers herself. She gives him a knowing look, a little smile then informs him the time and place she could be found after her work. Sophie, who intercepted Stephanie's look spends a sleepless night praying for her nephew, hoping that the look does not mean what she thinks it means. She is later to feel remorse for not having warned Pieter then and bring the matter out in the open. Stephanie may have trapped Pieter simply because she sensed his hunger without thinking of the danger the breaking of the law involved for him. Sergeant Steyn, whom Pieter has humbled in a fit of anger is poised to strike Pieter when he can. Although it is not explicitly mentioned, Steyn has threatened to take Stephanie's child away from her if she
does not fall with his plan. Just as her misconducts are well-known to the police, so is Stephanie's attachment to her child well-known. In fact, Sophie exclaims that the girls is like a tigress where her child is concerned. If Sergeant Steyn threatens to take her child away, Stephanie will do anything he says. She forces Pieter to repeat his offence so he could be charged and exposed. It is unfortunate that there should be the Sergeant Steyns of this world, who have nothing to gain by their despicable actions besides compromising their own integrities.

Before actually breaking the law, Pieter is well aware of the danger he is exposed to. He prays continually 'O God, wees my genadig, Here Jesus wees my genadig' which is 'O God, have mercy upon me, Lord Jesus have mercy upon me'. His Christian upbringing to a certain extent checks and influences his thoughts. The dominee's sermons about repentance, mercy and the liberating power of God's love moves him deeply. But when the dominee emphasizes the importance of obedience, Pieter does not agree as he has deduced that his obedience was the cause of his black moods. Unaware of the dilemma and Pieter's subsequent capitulation to temptation, dominee Vos asks him to be a diaken in the church. There is a kind of tragic irony in their conversation:

"...You're looked up to by the whole community. You've been given great gifts by the Lord. Shouldn't those gifts be given back to Him"
also? Mightn't some young fellow say, there's Pieter van Vlaanderen, and what he does I'll do too?

So Pieter van Vlaanderen put on all his armour, and he looked straight at the young dominee and said, I'm not good enough.

-Ah, it's right to say that. But often when a man says, I'm not good enough to do it, but I'll do it, then he finds he has strength to be better.

Pieter says he will think it over and he writes his thoughts in the 'secret book':

"When he had gone, and Nella had gone to bed, I went to my study and thought over the matter of becoming a diaken. I did not know if it would help me or otherwise, for if I could break one sacred vow, why should I be able to keep another? And if I broke one law, why would two be better? Then I thought perhaps it would give me a higher duty and the very highness of the duty would be a help to me; yet why should a man be able to do a higher duty when he cannot do a low?

I vowed anew that never again would I commit the unspeakable offence, and I decided that I would take no second vow until I could keep the first.

But Pieter does commit the offence again. As before, a feeling of uncleanness and self loathing fills him. But the prayers and the vows, although they come from the depth of his being are not really the prayers of a man who has sinned and cried out to God in repentance. As a Christian, Pieter has broken the commandment not to commit adultery. But this has not really registered in his mind. He is only aware of having broken the iron law and his prayers and supplications are prompted by the fear of being found out.
With imagination suddenly grown wild, Pieter thinks that may be God would work wonders such as the unseen watcher and Stephanie might die, there might be a war or a natural calamity so awful that everything else would be forgotten or forgiven. But when Pieter repeats his offence, he does not pray as before. It is as if the various biblical passages concerning temptation and forgiveness of sins have some meaning which is beyond his understanding. A gentleness and humility and a sort of peace comes over him till the charge is brought out against him when again fear and terror assails him. Fear of the law is apparently greater than the fear of God for Afrikaners because an offender is promptly punished as soon as the offence is discovered. Whereas God forgives, Afrikaners punish without giving one a chance to repent. Once the charge is made and the guilt proved, Pieter passes through yet another phase. He is no longer afraid of the punishment nor is he assailed by the black moods. He is in a way purged and cleansed of all unholy desires. He had been at the point of taking his own life when his friend Kapie finds him in Slabbert's Field. Pieter talks to him and tells him about how he feels cleansed, and Sophie knows that he is truly destroyed. But the exposure of his folly, at the same time it destroys him and his family has cleansed him. His is a broken and contrite heart - a sacrifice God does not despise. But why should he and his family be struck down in order to cleanse him is a secret.
The image of a terrified young man afraid of being discovered and exposed is replaced by a new one as at the end, Pieter gains in dignity and stature. The sorrowing man, repentant of his sins attains the stature of a tragic hero.

Besides the personal dilemma of Pieter van Vlaanderen, the rigidity of the Church, especially the Dutch Reformed Church, whose belief and practice is contrary to the teachings of Christ finds exposure in the novel. Its laws and principles are as rigid as the Mosaic laws in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, especially in Leviticus and Deuteronomy the Lord has decreed through Moses that adulterers should be stoned to death. In South Africa, the rigidity of the Immorality Act is almost parallel to these ancient laws except that it was made out of the sense of superiority and pride. As an eminent and faithful member of the Church, Jakob van Vlaanderen does not hesitate to disown his son who has offended against this Act. He orders his sister Sophie to remove every trace of 'the man' so that for all he cares, Pieter might never have existed. He had once answered a drunken fool who cried 'whats the point of living, what's the point of life?' with 'The point of living is to serve the Lord your God and to uphold the honour of your Church and language and people'. By his offence, his son has dishonoured the Lord, the church and the Afrikaners and so in Jakob's opinion, he is not fit to
live anymore. He reads the terrible words from the Hundreth and ninth Psalm, which Sophie feels, should not be in any Holy book:

"When he shall be judged, let him be condemned; and let his prayer become a sin. Let his days be few; and let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow... Let there be none to extend mercy unto him; neither let there be any to favour his fatherless children..."

It has never occurred to Jakob that there is such a thing as the wonder of the mercy of God. For a person who reads only the Bible and that too regularly, Jakob is strangely ignorant of the forgiveness of sin through grace. With true Afrikaner pride, his daughter Martha returns her engagement ring to dominee Vos. The dominee who had preached powerful sermons about backsliders and forgiveness is bewildered and hurt, thinking for a time only about his love. The old dominee does not know how to counsel him because the Church is more important than personal feelings, and it must at all cost remain beyond reproach and not be a stumbling block for its members. In recent years, serious doubts have arisen within the ministries of the Dutch Reformed Church about the moral basis of Apartheid. Since no man is infallible and even the most upright of man is liable to fall or stumble, it is necessary for the church to reconsider its stand. Captain Massingham rightly says that if man takes unto himself God's right to punish, then he must also take upon himself
God's promise to restore; while an offender must be punished, it is the greatest offence to punish and not restore. This is the offence of South Africa. She punishes but does not restore those who offend against the Immorality Act. Her argument being an offence had been committed against the race. Captain Massingham's reply to Nella's father is worthy of note: "Meneer, as a policeman, I know an offence against the law, and as a Christian, I know an offence against God; but I do not know an offence against the race". The Captain is an Englishman and it may be noted that the English speaking white South Africans are more liberal than the Afrikaners. It is he who promises to stand by Pieter and not Jakob. Jakob van Vlaanderen is a true Afrikaner. He is contemptuous of Englishmen as a whole, with the exception of one or two. He is a member of the Dutch Reformed Church and he regards the Apostolic Churches as traitors. With Pieter's offence, Jakob van Vlaanderen is destroyed along with the rest of his family. He dies searching the book of Job for the answers of his silent questions. He had, even on earlier occasions read from the book of Job, but ironically, he fails to do for his children, what Job does for his own. "Job... rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually".
What Jakob fails to do for his son, Mrs. van Vlaanderen does for him. She had prayed for Pieter ceaselessly that whatever was troubling him would be removed. She is all love and gentleness, cast in the mould of obedience, subject to the will and authority of her husband. This obedience to her husband prevents her from going to her son who asks for her in his hour of pain. Nevertheless she sends her love and support through Sophie by saying, "... God is both lover and judge of man and it is His commandment that we join Him in loving, but to judge we are forbidden. You will say both to my son and my daughter that my love is multiplied, and although I am shut off from them by the door of a house, all the doors of my heart are open; I will remember them by day and by night, till I am permitted to go to my rest. But this love I may not show, you will show for me."

And you will say to my son that though he may suffer under the law, there is no law that can cut him off from our love, nor from the love of his friends.¹²

Mrs. van Vlaanderen does not condemn her son like her husband. Who knows that deep inside her, unknown to her husband and sister-in-law, her heart is not broken in two. There is a degree of similarity between Mrs. van Vlaanderen and Mary, the mother of Jesus. Both pondered in their hearts about their sons and it was prophesied to Mary that a sword would pierce his mother's soul like a sword. But
in the way Mrs. van Vlaanderen meekly submits to the will of her husband, delegating her sister-in-law to be surrogate mother, she is more in line with Clara Copperfield, who leaves it to Peggotty to visit young David Copperfield when his step father imprisoned him in the attic. Sophie experiences no dilemma between going to her nephew and staying in her brother's house. It does not matter to her that by going to her nephew, she must sever all ties with her brother with whom she had lived for thirty years. A young man broken and bruised of heart is more important than herself. She is full of love for her nephew and also full of sorrow and regret that she had not warned him of his danger. She is no less greater than Mrs. van Vlaanderen as an embodiment of Christian love. These two women and Captain Massingham are the only real subscribers to true Christianity. They have neither the Afrikaner's pride nor the Dutch Reformed Church's rigidity. Instead of feeling self-righteous they are sympathetic and forgiving, because they are aware of their own shortcomings and past mistakes.

Just as there is the restoration of Ndotsheni in Cry, The Beloved Country, so also there is action for restoration in Too Late The Phalarope. Mrs. van Vlaanderen, Sophie, and Japie Grobler are involved in a social work to uplift native, women and children. This is again a part of the South African dilemma. While
Afrikaners strive to maintain and preserve white purity and identity, to the point of enforcing a law such as the Immorality Act, they cannot ignore the natives. Mrs. van Vlaanderen is President of the Women’s Welfare Committee and it is at her insistence that Japie Grobler is called to Venterspan to function as Social Welfare Officer. Their struggles for the upliftment of the natives proves to be the cause of their destruction, but they are not bitter towards the natives. Love, which had prompted them in the first place sustains them and helps them to forgive the wrong-doers. Unlike them, James Jarvis in Cry, The Beloved Country takes up social work not for love of the natives, but because his son had the conviction that service to South Africa is the only way to end the conflict in one’s deepest soul. By reading through his son’s papers, Jarvis realises that white South Africa needs to do something for the development of the natives which will in turn bring her peace of mind. By involving themselves in social work, Jarvis, Mrs. van Vlaanderen and Sophie are able to bear the hurts and the wrongs done to them by natives without anger and thoughts of revenge. They are blessed with a kind of peace even though they grieve for the country that gives them birth. Captain Massingham has rightly observed to Sophie that “When a deep injury is done to us, we never recover until we forgive”. This holds true not only for the few characters involved in the novel but for South Africa as a whole. There is little hope for South Africa
unless her children - blacks, whites and coloureds learn to forgive one another. Since forgiveness comes only through love as we see in the case of Nella, Sophie and Mrs. van Vlaanderen, Paton has, as in his previous novel advocated love as the only solution for the South African dilemma. If this love does not come soon, it will be too late for South Africa as it is for Pieter van Vlaanderen.
END NOTES

1. Explained in the Introduction.
4. Paton, Alan: Too Late The Phalarope, p.84.
5. Ibid., p.85.
7. Ibid., p.213.
8. Ibid., p.88.
9. Ibid., p.204.
10. Ibid., p.205.
11. Holy Bible: Job 1:5.