BIBLIOGRAPHY

*

NON-FICTION

1928 ROSSETTI. *Duckworth.*
1930 LABELS. *Duckworth.*
1932 REMOTE PEOPLE. *Duckworth.*
1934 NINETY-TWO DAYS. *Duckworth.*
1935 EDMUND CAMPION (1935) (Hawthornden Prize 1936). *Longmans Green.*
1936 WAUGH IN ABYSSINIA. *Longmans Green.*
1939 ROBBERY UNDER LAW. *Chapman and Hall.*
1946 WHEN THE GOING WAS GOOD. *Duckworth.*

FICTION

1928 DECLINE AND FALL. *Chapman and Hall.*
1930 VILE BODIES. *Chapman and Hall.*
1932 BLACK MISCHIEF. *Chapman and Hall.*
1934 A HANDFUL OF DUST. *Chapman and Hall.*
1936 MR. LOVEDAY'S LITTLE OUTING. (Short Stories.) *Chapman and Hall.*
1938 SCOOP. *Chapman and Hall.*
1942 PUT OUT MORE FLAGS. *Chapman and Hall.*
1943 WORK SUSPENDED. (Two chapters of an unfinished novel. Published in a limited edition of 500 copies.) *Chapman and Hall.*
1945 BRIDESHEAD REVISITED. *Chapman and Hall.*
1947 SCOTT-KING'S MODERN EUROPE. *Chapman and Hall.*
1948 THE LOVED ONE. *Chapman and Hall.*

H. E. BATES

*

MICHAEL WILLIAMS

ALTHOUGH it is true to say that H. E. Bates started his literary life as a short-story writer, with *Day's End and Other Stories* in 1928, it is significant that the appearance of subsequent volumes of short stories has been freely punctuated throughout the years by works in the longer medium. Readers who are familiar with this writer's total ouput to date will know without having to be told, that in the novel Bates is continually resolving and solidifying, where in the short story, "each moment implies something it does not state; each sends out a brief signal on a certain emotional wave-length, relying on the attuned mental apparatus of the audience to pick it up".

Above all, the reader of a Bates short story is expected to appreciate the medium in which the writer is working. Without imagination, without the capacity for giving in order to receive, the reader of a short story by H. E. Bates is in for a rough time. To such a reader the barrow boys of the short story owe their bank balances.

One of the least intellectual of writers, Bates is a specialist in mood and feeling. It is not surprising, therefore, that he should rely so implicitly upon atmosphere to suggest the unspoken eloquence of a mood. In this he receives the most powerful assistance from having spent the greater part of his life looking at the English countryside with a passionate, all-embracing love that has sharpened his faculties of perception to so great an extent that, just as he can respond immediately to such natural phenomena as the gentle fall of snow on a winter landscape, or the feel of an orchard when the fruit is on the ground, approaching understanding directly through the senses, so he can bring the same sensuous approach to moments of emotional crisis in the lives of human beings.

It is not sufficient for such a writer to record a photographic impression of a country scene. He has to respond to it with his senses alight, to feel it in the bloodstream, even as Bates feels the atmosphere of the orchard in the story, *A German Idyll*:

> "The dahlias had been staked and tied and the stakes were hooded with flower-pots for earwigs. He touched the heavy heads of the dahlias as he passed along the path to the orchard itself. The grass under the trees, very long and thick, was scattered with fallen plums and pears. The air was full of a smell of the dank grass and a heavy scent, like wine, of the fruit that lay rotting everywhere in the bright sunshine."

A writer so dependent upon mood and feeling is likely to find his sharpest impression either in poetry or in the short story, and I do not think Bates would dispute the statement that his most memorable achievements have been attained within the space of a few thousand words. Nevertheless, an uninterrupted view of this writer's purpose would not be possible without considering the stories and the novels in relation to each other. Bates has very decided views both on the short story and the novel. In 1941, taking his cue from Virginia Woolf, he wrote that "the novel is predominantly an exploration or chronicle of life: reflecting and describing in some form the impact, entanglement, fruition, destruction or fulfilment of human motions and desires." To this can be added Mrs. Woolf's own comment, which Bates quoted with approval at the same time, that in the novel "characters begin young: they grow old; they move from scene to scene, from place to place". These remarks cannot be said to apply to every novel that Bates has written, but they do apply to four of them: *The Fallow Land* (1932), *The Poacher* (1935), *Spella Ho* (1938), and the short novel, *The Bride Comes to Evensford*, which appeared as late as 1943. It is no accident that these four novels, though they are not all equal in quality, are the four most mature novels that Bates has written.

It is not merely a question of differentiating between two distinct forms of literary expression, but also, and even more

significantly, of a capacity for dual vision. Each time Bates writes a short story he is looking at life from an oblique angle, seeing only the luminous moments isolated in time. This intentional narrowing of his line of vision enables him to give to a single incident, which may be emotional, physical, or a combination of both, the concentration which in the novel would be dispersed over a complete lifetime. In the novel, emotions and crises are toned down, seen in perspective, as a part of natural growth. This, at least, is what happens in those of Bates's novels which most faithfully reflect his purpose. What happens when the writer deliberately sets out to flout his purpose can be seen in *Fair Stood The Wind For France*, a novel in which a romantic relationship of love is set against a background of wartime adventure. There is no question here of any failure in technique. *Fair Stood The Wind For France* is a most skilful piece of craftsmanship, distinguished alike by good writing, dramatic incident, shrewd observation, a novel stamped with the hall-mark of the experienced practitioner. But it is a novel which for Bates necessarily represents a faking process. Its failure is at the core, where there is not sufficient depth of soil for nourishment. By the time Bates is in process of guiding the love affair between Franklin and Françoise to a lyrical climax, he has already held onto the note for too long. The rest is flatness, and cannot properly be covered up, however skilfully the attempt is made.

It may be that, because in the short story Bates has so often sailed as near to the rocks as he dared and by doing so produced some of his finest effects, in *Fair Stood The Wind For France* he was determined to bring off an equally fine piece of navigation in the novel. And he might very well have done so had he carried the big guns of a Hemingway. Perhaps it is too early yet to say that he won't. Meanwhile, however, Bates is well advised to keep his dual vision unimpaired, reserving for the short story the especial luminosity of a passionate and sustained lyricism. Here, where it is possible to time an exit to perfection, there is less temptation to hold the note for too long.

The rocks which Bates failed to avoid in *Fair Stood The Wind For France* are ready waiting in the short story, *Love Is Not Love*,

but with this difference: they are evaded. *Love Is Not Love* comes as near to being a pure love story as anything Bates has ever written. A young city typist, after repelling the persistent attentions of a pimply young man in her office, is powerfully attracted to a man she meets casually in a café. The attraction is mutual and soon the two are on easy terms. It is shortly after this that the girl discovers that Travers has a wooden leg. At first she is ashamed of her reactions and resolutely pushes them to one side. A climax comes when one day she sees the leg divorced from the living limb. From this moment it only needs the sight of the normal feet of her former admirer, now become quite personable, to make her realize that she cannot continue to go on seeing Travers. But when, after breaking the news to him as gently as she knows how, she looks round and sees him "standing like someone struck into inertia by heat and pain, his huge hands apathetically held at his side", she undergoes a great rush of emotion and runs back into his arms. The note of passionate lyricism on which this story ends is held and released at exactly the right moment. Any failure in this respect would have meant instant bathos. Superficially it might be possible to regard *Love Is Not Love* as a story of love triumphant. To do so, however, would be to confuse the writer's purpose. It is the mood of lyricism in which this story is engulfed that counts for everything. In this instance, the mood is evoked by the love that two human beings have for each other at a particular moment in time. What happens to Travers and his girl when the mood no longer sustains them is a matter for conjecture. It is neither the writer's purpose to suggest the eternal happiness of these two people, nor to suggest any subsequent disillusionment. The moment is unique and complete in itself, and this is what differentiates it from the faking suggestiveness of the relationship between Franklin and Françoise in *Fair Stood The Wind For France*, where the lyricism of the moment is subordinated to the demands of conventional romance.

The truth is that H. E. Bates is just about the most objective short-story writer now writing. So passionate an advocate of the purity of mood and feeling is not likely to be seduced into taking sides with his characters. Indeed, at different times throughout

his stories Bates is on the side of every character. It is very noticeable how when characters who are conventionally unpleasing appear in a Bates story, they do so as human beings capable of instinctive feelings as well as anyone else. In *The Beauty of the Dead*, in which an elderly miser persuades his wife that she doesn't need a fire to die by, the old man's obsession with his possessions is made to assume for the reader the shape and substance of poetry. And even the schoolmaster who tortures a small boy in the story *Jonah And Bruno*, is less a torturer than a means of assisting in the creation of a certain mood at a given moment in time. It may be possible for Bates to fail in the creation of a mood. But it is not possible for him to fall into sentimentality. Not in the short story, that is. This is one reason why it must be so amusing to Bates when reviewers start wondering how it is that a writer who seems to be within such easy reach of sentimentality always manages to avoid it.

Objectivity involves the writer in a withdrawal of personality. In order to see clearly, there must be occasions when he feels bound to stand apart from his characters. And if in order to do this he employs the device of using a narrator, he must be exceedingly careful to see that the narrator is not overburdened with personality. When Bates uses an adult narrator—as he does fairly frequently—he uses him for the most part as a passive receiving set for a series of impressions. Subjective narration in the first person occurs solely in those of his stories which are told by a small boy, and in the telling of which a special boy's-eye view of life is imparted. In those recurring stories which have each time something fresh to say about that old gallant, Uncle Silas, with a lifetime of devilry behind him and a watchful housekeeper at his side, an impression of the great and helpless old age of a man who has led an exceptionally active youth, and who now has to undergo the final humiliation of being washed, is immeasurably heightened by being passed through the filter of a small boy's imagination. The boy's-eye view of life is a level of consciousness for which Bates seems to reserve an especial tenderness, a tenderness due, in part, to the fact that the writer has not allowed himself to forget what it feels like to be a small boy in a

large world and, in part, one suspects, to the realization that the simplicity and purity of a child's vision has a beauty and truthfulness all its own. In *The Duet*, which is not told in the first person but which nevertheless does look out at adult life through the eyes of a small boy, something essential to Bates's purpose in the short story is caught. Horace Stringer is listening to two famous singers who have been staying in his father's house and are now on the concert platform:

> "Horace sat transfixed also. But he was thinking not so much of the singing and of Madame Stronheim and Erasmus joined together on the dais in solemn harmony, as of Erasmus holding Madame Stronheim in his arms in the bedroom and strumming on her stays as though she were a harp, and of Madame Stronheim, as though she were a harp in reality, responding with little musical giggles of joy.
>
> And he was beginning at the same time to have an idea that there were a great many things in the world that were not quite what they seemed to be."

The small boy in *The Duet* has grasped with his small boy's mind at a moment which, in one shape or another, is continuously present in the stories of his creator; a moment which suggests so much more than it holds, and depends for its poignancy so largely upon the ensuing silence. There is a perfect illustration of such a moment in the story, *Quartette*. Here, where two persons are in the grip of an emotion so powerful as to infect even those who do not understand it, the tension is almost unbearable:

> "George Abrahams stood between Tom Willis and Dora Williams, who did not look at each other. As soon as he opened his mouth he knew that he was going to sing very badly, and a second later, for the first time in his experience, he was hearing Miss Appleby forcing her notes, the warm ripe texture of her voice dry and broken. But he could hear on either side of him the voices of two people singing out of a deep pre-occupation, with painful beauty. He thought he could feel the passionate quality of their singing transcending the small hot room and the small bewildered minds of Miss Appleby and himself."

In the complex emotional mechanism of such stories as *The Bridge*, *Sally Go Round the Moon* and *I Am Not Myself*, no less than in the passionate voluptuousness of *The Station* and *The Kimono*, or the cold, calculated sensuality of *The Man Who Loved Cats*, the writer is making the reader sensuously aware that in order to see life whole, it is first of all desirable to see it as a succession of isolated moments, each moment having its particular properties of illumination.

In the short story, balanced as he is upon a knife-edge of lyrical feeling, Bates is constantly thinking in symbols. Although symbolism occurs too in the novels, it is used there with a necessary restraint, since too much drilling on the emotional nerves would almost certainly upset the equilibrium of the steadfast vision which is so indispensable to Bates's purpose as a novelist. But in the short story, moods and emotions are frequently of so tenuous a texture that any attempt at direct statement would instantly dissipate their purity.

And what more illuminating symbols could such a writer employ than those suggested by the natural life of the English countryside: orchards, floodland, millstreams, waterfalls, woods and fields, snow, harvest time; realities about which Bates is not only passionately responsive, but also extremely knowledgeable. Here perhaps it is an appropriate moment to remind the reader that Bates is the author of several volumes of essays deriving their inspiration from flower and field, and that he was for some time the contributor of a weekly nature article to *The Spectator*.

In *The House With The Apricot*, in many ways one of the finest stories that Bates has written, the very title has a symbolic relation to the rest of the story. A young man is given lodgings in the house of a young woman living alone with her father, an old man in a state of doddering decay. After the traveller has received the gratitude of his hostess for the care he has taken to lose a game of dominoes to the old man, he is moved to compare her, in his mind, with the apricot-tree that stands in the garden. He sees

that like the apricot-tree "she was both rich and barren, strong and useless, and the old man, like the tap root, fed her with his riches but kept her starved of joy". A moment later he is seeing the subject of his meditations smiling with what seems to be a serene and secret happiness. The moment of symbolism, so swift to illuminate, is already past. Its fragrance lingers, but as a bumble-bee lingers in the trumpet of a foxglove, without disturbing the tranquillity of a summer's day. When the narrator goes out to walk in search of wild flowers, he takes with him a note from his hostess with instructions to drop it into the house of a certain Mr. Abel Skinner. During his walk he is roughly accosted by a villainous-looking individual who shouts at him to get off his land. This, it transpires, is the man for whom the note was intended, and when Skinner is made to understand that the trespasser is the bearer of a note from the girl in the house at the foot of the hill, his demeanour undergoes a decided change. The two men go down together to Skinner's decrepit farmhouse, where the farmer proceeds to get exceedingly drunk, singing and belching with a freedom that astonishes his guest, who beats an unnoticed retreat in the middle of it all. When, later, the young man learns from his hostess that Abel Skinner has accepted her invitation to dine at the house with the apricot, he thinks immediately of the scene he has recently witnessed in the farm-house, and wonders with some trepidation how this Skinner is going to behave. However, when Skinner does arrive he is hardly recognizable as the same man. Irreproachably dressed, refusing the wine that is offered him, he sips his water with delicate sips.

> "All the time he behaved with a sort of respectable, restrained, Sunday-conscious cheerfulness. He carved beautifully. Once or twice he made little gestures or jokes, always beyond reproach, which made Angela titter. Finally when we were all served he took off his spectacles, laid them in his jacket and began to eat. He had carved himself a single slice off the breast."

It soon becomes apparent to the young man that Angela and

Skinner are engaged to be married, and that in Angela's eyes Mr. Abel Skinner is little short of being Clark Gable.

It is not possible to read *The House With The Apricot* without forcing the mind outside and beyond the framework of the story, the concluding words of which are no more final than in any other of Bates's works in the shorter medium. From the symbolism implicit in the title it might justifiably be supposed that *The House With The Apricot* is a story of irony. It is nothing so pointed. Sensuously impressionistic, perfect in its representation of fleeting moods, *The House With The Apricot* is built upon an edifice of wondering supposition.

If, however, the reader will consider *The House With The Apricot* in relation to the novels, he will see how the lyricism, which in the short stories is suspended luminously in time, is subjected to an ironing out process. Catherine Foster, in the novel of that name, also has her moments of lyricism, though naturally they are not observed in such a brilliant light. Married to the prosaic and unimaginative corn chandler, Andrew Foster, Catherine is starved of the poetry which her romantic spirit craves so ardently. The bird is fluttering its wings against the bars of the cage. The door of the cage is opened by Andrew's brother, Charles, a young man who makes up in poetry what he lacks in substance. The love affair between Catherine and Charles is passionate, romantic, and brief. When it is arbitrarily ended by Charles, Catherine is forced to look life full in the face. The bird, which now knows what it is to soar into the air as blithely as a lark, is back in the cage. Catherine's resignation is final and complete, and its very permanence gives it a serenity which, in its way, is strangely beautiful.

The end of *Catherine Foster* bears a striking similarity to the ending of *The Bride Comes to Evensford*. In both cases a woman comes face to face with a reality that has finally established itself as permanent and inevitable, and although in the one instance resignation is a product of the breaking up of a single emotional experience, and in the other comes when the wheel has had time to turn full cycle, the return, albeit not without its bitter taste, is a cause for serenity.

Until in 1932 Bates wrote *The Fallow Land*, he was, to a large extent, still dominated by the passion for Tchekovian incident which governed his work in the short story, and although even in these earlier novels his broader purpose was plainly discernible, the state of permanence implicit in their conclusion was too often reached by means of a short cut. Nothing, for instance, could be more final than the deaths of Tessie and Jenny in *The Two Sisters*, nor more significant than that the source of their death, the river, was also the source of their greatest happiness; but here finality, not being closely enough allied to physical growth, has too arbitrary an air to suggest the full strength of inevitability. Much the same thing applies to the return of Pauline to the slum of *Charlotte's Row*, for Pauline's return, like the emotional return made by Catherine Foster, was the result not of natural growth, but of an incident.

In *The Fallow Land*, however, the impression of natural growth is substantiated by the constant presence of the land itself, and there seems no doubt that Bates's unshakable faith in the land and the men and women who live in close relation to it, sustained him in his purpose. So single-minded a contemplation of the land was bound, one feels, to result in fruition. In this connection it is rewarding to see how, at almost the last moment, the novelist switches concentration from the admirable and virtuous Deborah Mortimer to the far less admirable Jess, who is returning as an old man to the land and the wife—now dying and without further use for him—he deserted when he was in the heyday of the blood. The wheel has, in truth, come full cycle. As old Jess Mortimer stares across at the field he knows so well, he sees it not as the field which Deborah's lone faith made rich with increase, but as the field he knows to be unchangeable, a field as permanent as his own return to it:

> "The field lay rough and fallow, without a furrow turned. It looked to him just as it had looked in his father's time, as though it had never been touched, the same old field difficult to plough and worse to reap, never worth the trouble of seed or harvest."

The Poacher, like *The Fallow Land*, is primarily a novel of physical growth, and in both these novels, so sensuous with the atmosphere of the English countryside, life proceeds with the placid unquestioning assurance of a pair of plough horses moving lazily across a field of arable. The lyricism which in the short story is given over to the moment, is here implicit in the atmosphere of slowly maturing growth. Jess Mortimer is not, considered objectively, a pretty character, yet his end in the novel is similar to the end of the pure-hearted Luke Bishop in *The Poacher*. Luke too is an old man wrapped in loneliness and, unlike Jess Mortimer, he has not even a roof over his head. It is not a case of either man having deserved his lonely estate, but of life resolving itself. The impression left by both novels is one of serenity and fruition, of life seen in the round.

Now it is obvious that both Jess Mortimer and Luke Bishop must at one time or another have experienced moments in which their spirits soared in flights of lyricism which neither man could have explained to himself. It is even possible to point to such moments in the two novels. But in order to catch at the extremities of poignancy reached in a moment of time, it would be necessary for the mind to reach out beyond the novels and lift these moments out of the short stories. If this were not the case and Bates had allowed himself to be seduced from his purpose by holding up time in the novels and segregating one moment from another, he would not be justified in writing novels at all. Yet, by reading the novels and short stories and bearing in mind their complementary relationship to each other, it is possible to have the best of both worlds without injury to either one in the process.

If we compare Luke Bishop in *The Poacher* with Bruno Shadbolt in *Spella Ho* we see that whilst both characters have certain things in common the difference between the two is nevertheless very great. Both Bruno and Luke are, basically, creatures of instinct. Both, early on in their lives, have to pass through a crisis which is to play a large part in determining their future actions. Luke sees his father struck down in his prime as the result of a brush with a gamekeeper, Bruno sees his in the arms of a greedy woman. Luke reacts to his crisis instinctively.

Bruno also reacts instinctively, at first; but soon his brain is working with massive logic. From the moment Bruno Shadbolt begins to fumble with logic he and Luke Bishop are creatures set apart from each other. The tempo of Luke Bishop's life is slow; that of Bruno Shadbolt's, slow at first, gathers momentum as instinct increasingly gives way to more complicated mental processes.

Part, at least, of Bates's purpose in *Spella Ho* is revealed by the division of the novel into seven parts, the five middle parts being called after the names of the different women in Bruno Shadbolt's life, and the first and last part bearing the name of the big house from which Bruno stole coal as a boy and which as an old man he owned. All the same, whilst it is clear enough that in *Spella Ho* Bates was concerned to make a much more detailed statement about life than he had hitherto attempted, the growth of Bruno Shadbolt has a purpose beyond itself. When, at last, Bruno looks back across the years it is to see that Time has paced him with great footsteps of obliteration.

> "He walked up the avenue under the bare limes, the massed claret twigs almost the only colour now in the dark air. He had driven away from the avenue gates with Gerda. There was no record of it. It might not have happened, he thought. He had seen Virginia and Caroline biking down the avenue and coming a cropper in the summer grass, skirts high over pink bloomers such as you now saw displayed in every tuppeny shop in the world and whenever almost a woman sat down at all. There was no record of that moment of terrific unconventionality, or of the two lovely golden creatures. No record. A gasometer had a record. It keeps on, you record it in figures. Pig-iron has more permanence than a woman. It lasts for ever; the stones of a house last with it. What happens to us? he thought. There's no record for us."

So the man of property is able to put into words what the Luke Bishops and Jess Mortimers of the world perceive instinctively but are unable to express.

A man may be simple or complex, the possessor of great wealth or without a roof over his head, a rogue or a saint in the world's eyes, but whatever he is or wherever he goes, he is nevertheless subject to the same natural laws. The moment, however pregnant with promise, must inevitably submerge itself in Time.

This, Bates seems to say, is how it works out in the long run.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

★

1928 DAY'S END AND OTHER STORIES. *Jonathan Cape.*
1929 CATHERINE FOSTER (novel). *Jonathan Cape.*
1929 SEVEN TALES AND ALEXANDER (Limited edition). *Scholastic Press.*
1930 THE TREE (short story). *E. Lahr.*
1931 CHARLOTTE'S ROW (novel). *Jonathan Cape.*
1931 A THRESHING DAY (short story: limited edition). *Foyles.*
1931 THE TWO SISTERS (novel). *Jonathan Cape.*
1932 THE BLACK BOXER (short stories). *Jonathan Cape.*
1932 THE FALLOW LAND (novel). *Jonathan Cape.*
1932 SALLY GO ROUND THE MOON (short story: limited edition). *White Owl Press.*
1932 THE STORY WITHOUT AN END (short story: limited edition) *White Owl Press.*
1933 THE HOUSE WITH THE APRICOT AND TWO OTHER TALES (Limited edition). *Golden Cockerel Press.*
1934 THIRTY TALES. (collection). *Jonathan Cape.*
1934 THE WOMAN WHO HAD IMAGINATION AND OTHER STORIES. *Jonathan Cape.*
1935 CUT AND COME AGAIN (short stories). *Jonathan Cape.*
1935 THE DUET (short story: limited edition). *Grayson.*
1935 FLOWERS AND FACES (essays: limited edition). *Golden Cockerel Press.*
1935 THE POACHER (novel). *Jonathan Cape.*

1936 A HOUSE OF WOMEN (novel). *Jonathan Cape.*
1936 THROUGH THE WOODS (essays). *Gollancz.*
1937 DOWN THE RIVER (essays). *Gollancz.*
1937 SOMETHING SHORT AND SWEET (short stories). *Jonathan Cape.*
1938 SPELLA HO (novel). *Jonathan Cape.*
1939 THE FLYING GOAT (short stories). *Jonathan Cape.*
1939 MY UNCLE SILAS (collection). *Jonathan Cape.*
1940 COUNTRY TALES (collection). *Jonathan Cape.*
1940 THE BEAUTY OF THE DEAD (short stories). *Jonathan Cape.*
1940 THE SEASONS AND THE GARDENER (essays). *Cambridge University Press.*
1942 IN THE HEART OF THE COUNTRY (essays). *Country Life.*
1942 THE MODERN SHORT STORY (criticism). *Nelson.*
1942 R.A.F. (Editor: War Pictures by British Artists). *Oxford University Press.*
1942 THE GREATEST PEOPLE IN THE WORLD (short stories: under pseudonym of Flying Officer X). *Jonathan Cape.*
1943 HOW SLEEP THE BRAVE (short stories: under pseudonym of Flying Officer X.) *Jonathan Cape.*
1943 THE BRIDE COMES TO EVENSFORD (short novel). *Jonathan Cape.*
1943 COUNTRY LIFE (essays). *Penguin Books.*
1943 O! MORE THAN HAPPY COUNTRYMAN (essays). *Country Life.*
1944 FAIR STOOD THE WIND FOR FRANCE (novel). *Michael Joseph.*
1944 SOMETHING IN THE AIR (short stories: under pseudonym of Flying Officer X). *Jonathan Cape.*
1945 THE DAY OF GLORY (play). *Michael Joseph.*
1946 THE CRUISE OF THE BREADWINNER (short story). *Michael Joseph.*
1947 THIRTY-ONE SELECTED STORIES. *Jonathan Cape.*
[1]1947 THE PURPLE PLAIN (novel). *Jonathan Cape.*

[1] Published after completion of this essay.

LIAM O'FLAHERTY

*

SEAN O'FAOLAIN

I OFTEN think that anybody approaching Irish literature should call to mind at once that very important thing about Irish life, which has such a profound effect on all Irish writing, the fact that Irish life is unconventional. The basic thing about Ireland is that it is a peasant country; what we call "polite society", with its firmly established and clearly defined conventions and rules, amounting, or mounting, to punctilio, exists in Ireland only in enclaves or little islands of convention besieged by the darkness of the folk mind and riddled by Fifth Columns wearing bowler hats underneath which there fumes the Arcane.

It is hard to say what takes the place of our conventions in a peasant's mind. Traditional habits and customs, flexible, varying from place to place, plain undiluted folk taboos and sanctions—by which I mean the habit of doing or not doing things for reasons that he doesn't himself in the least understand? When people live so close to nature as the peasant does conventional behaviour cannot be the important thing. A peasant may be and often is as proud as a prince, he may have and often has the sensibilities of a poet, he may and often does carry himself like a hidalgo; but he does it all and shows it all through his own human dignity and not by a set of outward and recognized tokens or reticences. Such things give way, in the stress and struggle of nature, to an older, deeper, more traditional and indefinable technique of living and dying.

One can see at once how this way of being traditional without being conventional gives immense opportunities to the story-teller; and one can also see how it sets very strict limitations to him. To put it very loosely, he has immediate access to human nature's deepest and darkest passions; but there is also a vast area