

H. E. Bates

"I had supposed," wrote H. E. Bates who died on Monday, aged 68, "that the aftermath of war would find expression, after the long dark tragic years, in light and joy. It never occurred to me, even remotely, that it might well express itself in a sourness even darker."

If under his pseudonym of "Flying Officer X" Bates had given poignant expression to the mood of the nation in the early 1940s, he was in the post-war era sadly out of tune with the times. However, this made absolutely no difference to his output: a steady stream of work in his easy fluent style poured from his pen. In his lifetime he published between 60 and 70 volumes of fiction, short stories, autobiography and essays.

At its best his work has the gentle life-enhancing virtues of the English water-colourists; its roots were in rural and village life whose slow seasonal rhythms Bates beautifully captured. Hardy without the cosmic gloom? Not quite, because Bates was content to stay near the pastoral

surface; and, unlike Hardy's, his prose never became convoluted. How well he used it to depict the exotic settings of Burma and Kashmir in three of his best books, *The Purple Plain* (1947) and *The Jacaranda Tree* (1949) *The Scarlet Sword* (1951). It was during this fruitful period that Bates wrote his study of his mentor Edward Garnett, and one of his tenderest and most sensual country novels, *Love for Lydia*. After that the Larkins began somewhat unfortunately to emerge.

Even when he was drinking cocktails in the Savoy Hotel something of the calm of the country pub clung to Bates. He was unpressed by time and unimpressed by the smart metropolitan life around him; he would settle down happily sipping his whisky sour to talk about something of real importance such as writers' fees or the art of the short story, about which he wrote a characteristically personal book, and would then give rein to his admirations. One of the strongest, I recall, was for Hemingway.

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Curtis, Anthony. "H. E. Bates." Financial Times, 30 Jan. 1974. Financial Times Historical Archive, link. gale.com/apps/doc/HS2304312929/FTHA?u=hop_jisc&sid=bookmark-FTHA&xid=8f905ad5. Accessed 27 June 2021.