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## Fiction of the Week

By H. E. BATES

# The Modern Short Story



"Here's to Economy!" From Joyce Dennys' *Economy Must be Our Watchword*

MODERN AMERICAN SHORT STORIES. Edited by E. J. O'BRIEN. Cape. 7s. 6d.

WHEN I recently reviewed Mr. O'Brien's two yearly volumes of English and American stories I was accused of saying nothing about the short story itself and of merely giving a puff to Mr. O'Brien. It is not my business to puff either people or their books. In every volume of Mr. O'Brien's I have found stories which I think atrocious and missed stories which I admire greatly, but if I were to detest every story he chooses I could not help admiring the industry and courage with which he studies an art that has received less recognition than perhaps any other form of literature.

His new volume is an anthology compiled from his annual anthologies of American stories; there are twenty-five stories, of which none is earlier than 1915 or later than 1930. The dates are significant. Sherwood Anderson did not begin to publish his stories until 1916, Katherine Mansfield did not publish *The Garden Party* till 1922—also the date of Anderson's *I'm A Fool*—and by 1915 Stephen Crane had been dead just long enough to be forgotten and not long enough to be rediscovered. It may be coincidence, but the period from 1915 to 1922 is a lean one. The stories are chiefly by writers concerned primarily with the novel, such as Dreiser, and of the short story as it appears in the second period, 1922-1930, there is no sign. The influence of Crane, that superb and half-forgotten artist whose paint is still as fresh and brilliant as the day he put it on with such audacious and unerring skill, is simply negative. Crane, of whom it was said that he came to the short story perfectly equipped, might never have existed. Something or other—the War, the magazine story, the chronicle novel, had frozen him out.

Anderson, perhaps the oddest writer who ever came out of America, simple and subtle, naive and profound, restful and disturbing at once, did for the American short story what Crane had tried but had inexplicably failed to do. He revolutionized its form and gave it

fresh life and values, and after him we get a finer, more vigorous short story which grows year by year purer and more natively American. Hemingway, the most important influence after Anderson, is equalled in purity of form, simplicity of method, and fidelity to atmosphere, only by Crane. His great story, *The Undeclared*, is included here. Contrast it with the slick magazine-made tales of Fannie Hurst and Barry Benfield. What mongrel stuff! Compare them also with the rich, indigenous art of Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Ruth Suckow or Willa Cather. The result is even less fortunate for them.

There are many good names besides these in Mr. O'Brien's volume—Manuel Kormoff, Elinor Wylie, White Burnett, Konrad Bernovici, Ring W. Lardner, Zona Gale, but Mr. O'Brien's last date, 1930, has robbed him of a host of younger writers whose stories would have made his collection far more truly representative of the modern American story than it is.\*\*\*\*

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## Some Novels of the Week

ECONOMY MUST BE OUR WATCHWORD. By Joyce Dennys. Putnam. 5s. If you liked *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* you will like even better this story of Petal and her husband. First-rate humorous stuff.\*\*\*

NINETEEN NINETEEN. By John dos Passos. Constable. 7s. 6d. A sequel to *The 42nd Parallel*: a cinematographic Joycean novel of America during the War. Nothing skimped about it, strong meat; and something more than a clever stunt.\*\*\*\*

ENGLISH COMEDY. By John C. Moore. Dent. 7s. 6d. About a solicitors' clerk who got the sack and went roaming through the countryside. His aunt had left him five hundred a year, so there was some excuse for him. High-spirited, provoking, and with a happy healthy feeling for the English country.\*\*\*

LITTLE RED HORSES. By G. B. Stern. Heinemann. 8s. 6d. The author's most cunning and self-conscious mixture of love-beauty-romance-and-art for her biggest audience. Her smaller and more difficult audience will be disappointed.\*\*\*

BARRED. By EDWARD DE NEVE. Desmond Harmsworth. 7s. 6d. The Foreign Legion, a French prison, deportation are the miseries endured by the hero of this novel. He descends into the underworld and rises again with the aid of a forged passport. The author's aim is to attack nationalism.\*\*\*

VOICES FROM THE DUST. By JEFFERY FARNOL. Macmillan. 7s. 6d. Episodes of history from Roman times to the present day. All set in London. All exhibiting Mr. Farnol's boisterous romantic energy.\*\*\*

JUNE LIGHTNING. By Elizabeth Murray. Lane. 7s. 6d. An exquisite theme, the devotion of a family to the younger sister, handled clumsily and with flatness. But the characters have reality.\*\*\*

TIME—PLEASE! By Ailsa Lindsay. Joiner and Steele. 7s. 6d. An inn-keeper and his wife are the chief characters, and we are let into the secrets of how they run their pub. They are splendid company.\*\*\*

To enable readers to judge the merits of novels at a glance, we add stars to these short notices. Five stars denote a masterpiece, four stars a novel of outstanding quality, and so down to one star.