

BUT THAT IS ANOTHER STORY

WALTER DE LA MARE: *A Beginning and Other Stories*. 256pp. Faber and Faber 12s. 6d.

EUDORA WELTY: *The Bride of the Innisfallen*. 190pp. Hamish Hamilton. 12s. 6d.

H. E. BATES: *The Daffodil Sky*. 256pp. Michael Joseph. 12s. 6d.

JOHN PUDNEY (Editor): *Pick of Today's Short Stories*, 6. 256pp. Putnam. 12s. 6d.

Once upon a time the short story was a readily recognized genre. (The "magazine short story" fitted into the species, though at a more elementary level.) Even Chekhov told a tale, and Henry James made a point. Now, we may not have changed all that altogether, but there are as many kinds of short story as there are of music. (The parallel is not accidental, and could be looked at by the psychologists and sociologists.) These four volumes cover a remarkable range, from traditional little tunes to harmonies so ravishing as to be barely heard.

Of the latter Mr. de la Mare is the greatest living composer. He will not despise the analogy with sound. His latest octogenarian offering, *A Beginning and Other Stories*, opens in characteristic fashion:

A silence, peculiar to itself, seemed to possess the little dark shop in the back street running up from the river—the silence, as it were, of intent listeners. "Odd Shop," the tale is called, and an odd shop it is, dealing only in curious and out-of-the-way sounds. In the second tale, "Music," the visitor to the strange Dr. Brandt hears a sound "the like of which I cannot recall having heard, either from wind or water." Mr. de la Mare, placing himself on that edge of being that we ourselves can never approach, once again conjures up both scenes and syren-songs that never were on land or sea. "A great, rare, and unusual mind has its own pathways to follow," says one of his characters, and of no one is it truer than of himself. "Neighbours" is an ironical tale; "The Princess" a cruel one; "The Guardian" a sad one. "An Anniversary" would not have disgraced—its art would, indeed, have brought the highest grace to—Grand Guignol. "What the eye cannot see, the skin may become aware of!" There is the touch of the master.

Miss Eudora Welty's stories give one some idea of what Cinemascope or VistaVision would be like in the Festival Hall. The commonplace becomes appreciably larger than life and the acoustics are so perfect that one only in retrospect precipitates the sound from the sounds. Everything is depicted, no undertone is missed. That is the impression, but like all artists Miss Welty is

selecting cunningly all the time. The seeming chatter in "Going to Naples," one of the two best stories in her new collection, is a beautiful composition. Characters, moods, places all come to life. One wonders at the end what it has all added up, but one tries to avoid doing in life itself in case the answer is too painful. When it comes to description Miss Welty is always in sharp focus.

That girl's straight hair, cut like a little train to a point at the nape of her neck, her little pointed nose that came down in the one unindented line which began at her hair, her swimming, imagining eyes, held them all, like her lover, perfectly still. Love was amazement now. The lovers did not touch, for a thousand reasons, but that was one.

"No Place for You, My Love," the story of a "brief encounter" in New Orleans, is remarkable in the sultriness it manages to convey. "The Burning" is a horrid episode in the American Civil War.

In *The Daffodil Sky*, as in all Mr. Bates's other stories, we know exactly where we are, if only because we are in more temperate climes. Mr. Bates writes simply; his instinct is a deep compassion. "The Good Corn," which opens his volume, tells of a farmer and his wife who find happiness and fulfilment in adopting the man's illegitimate child. The second story, "The Daffodil Sky," concerns a man who comes back after serving a sentence for manslaughter, and meets the daughter of the girl he should have married. The whole force of the tales is in their naturalness and verisimilitude. The newspapers daily report lives just like those of Mr. Bates's characters. Mr. Bates can be ironical, and sometimes his smile is wry, but there is no better writer of straightforward short stories—short of genius, it is true, but far above the machine-made affairs of yesterday—in English to-day.

With Mr. Pudney we are in more motley company. He gives good measure; his latest "pick" brings us 28 stories by different authors. Many of them are accomplished; almost all have some entertainment value. They mostly exhibit talent rather than art. But they will have innumerable readers and are an indispensable part of the multifarious world of the short story.