

May-hem on the farm

H. E. BATES:

The Triple Echo

79pp. Michael Joseph. 16s.

Alice-Charlesworth, a young woman trying to run a small, isolated farm on her own while her husband is a prisoner of war in the hands of the Japanese, finds a soldier from a neighbouring camp walking over her land. Barton is a farmer's son and loathes his enforced soldier's life. Slowly the two get acquainted, and when his leave comes round he overstays it with her.

In this way they become committed to the watchful life which desertion imposes on them. The summer flourishes and fades, Prowling soldiers (by now there is a new

lot at the camp) mark down two lonely women (Barton is disguising herself as Alice's sister), and of course, the disguise does not help them for long. The redcaps come for Barton and Alice shoots her lover together with the sergeant handcuffed to him.

The story builds up its tension with swiftness and economy. The seasons, from May with the Hawthorn in bloom to December with the hare making tracks across the snow, are evoked with a sureness of touch which still gives pleasure, even though Mr. Bates has been demonstrating how good he is at this for nearly half a century.

The novella ends with the triple echo set up by the shooting and with Barton and the sergeant lying dead. The last sentence is: "After that it

was very quiet on the hills and the cap of the dead sergeant was very scarlet on the snow." That "very scarlet" points to Mr. Bates's besetting fault: the occasionally uncontrolled itch to overplay his verbal hand.

Editorial Sudamericana of Buenos Aires have just published a composite hardback volume of the short stories of the Argentinian writer Julio Cortázar: *Relatos* (630pp.). Included are the stories published in *Bestiario* (1951), *Las armas secretas* (1959), *Final del juego* (1964), *Todos los fuegos al fuego* (1966). Sr. Cortázar has taken the chance to disturb the chronological order of the stories and, regroup them in three sections as "Ritos", "Juegos" and "Pasajes".