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Books and Bookmen

The only monthly magazine exclusively devoted to books and authors

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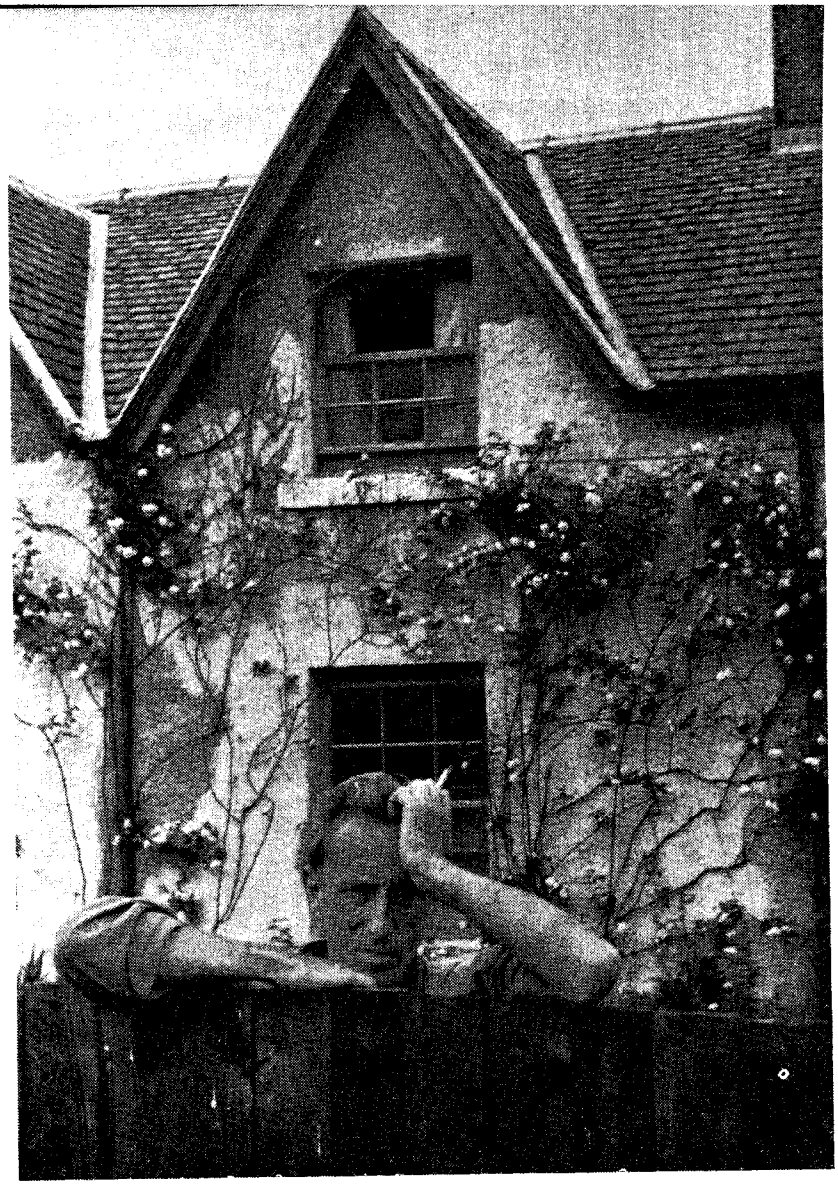

FRONT COVER: Scene from *August* 1914 by Barbara Tuchman, a vivid reconstruction of the first month of the First World War, to be published by Constable on May 24th.

BACK COVER: Maurice Collis and his daughter Louise sorting the Stanley Spencer papers (page 21)

Books and Bookmen

advertisement directors
ANNE GARDINER ALFRED FISHBURN

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Gavin Maxwell

THE WORLD OF BOOKS LOOKS LIKE A SCENE FROM GEORGE ORWELL'S *Animal Farm*. The animals are in complete command. To last year's otters, lions, cats and dogs are added *Timmy, the Story of a Sparrow, The Cry of a Bird, Return to the Wild* (more lions), *The Biology of Art* (monkeys as artists), and two books proving that dolphins are of superior intelligence to man. For the summer we are even threatened with " the story of Nardoo and Pinto, two kangaroos who were brought from the burning plains of South Australia to a garden in Lincoln ". One of these days someone is going to write a nice warm story about a human being and all the critics will hail it as the " new trend ".

Ring of Bright Water sold over 120,000 copies. Author Gavin Maxwell looks like staying in the money with the newly published supplement, *The Otter's Tale* (Longmans, 18s.) which, he says, is for children but the publishers insist is for general consumption. They are probably right; we are all the same mental age when it comes to otters. Maxwell, 47, is now on honeymoon, heading for Rhodesia in a Land Rover via the Atlas Mountains. Shamefully, the beloved otters have been left at home consoled only by a daily feed of eels specially delivered from Fortnum and Mason.

The Short Story Today

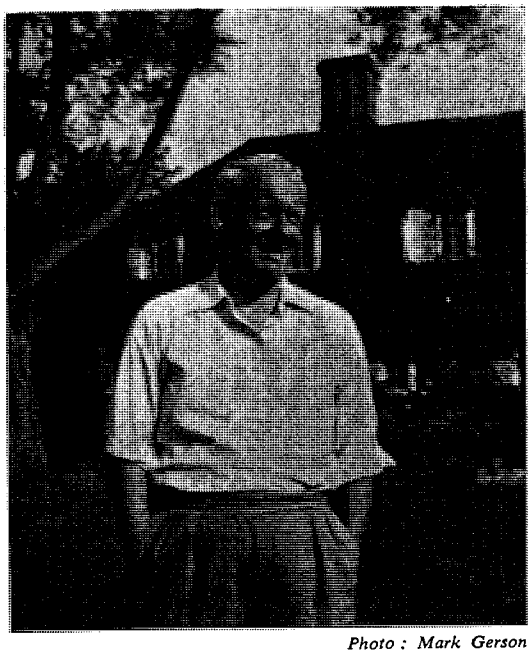


Photo : Mark Gerson

H. E. BATES

A Mug's Game

THE HISTORY OF THE SHORT STORY, both past and present, is beset with odd myths, some of them plain silly, and a considerable number of contradictions, some of them difficult to explain. The notion that people do not read short stories in volume form whereas they read them avidly in magazines is itself a good example of both myth and contradiction and was already an old chestnut when I first began writing short stories more than 35 years ago. There was, in fact, little truth in it then, as the publishers of Hemingway, Maugham, Katherine Mansfield, Erkskine Caldwell, Thurber, Lawrence and many others could testify. There is even less today.

Another myth, which I shall proceed to demolish in more detail in a moment or two, is that the demise of so many so-called literary magazines in the 20-odd years since the beginning of the war has been a source of serious discouragement to short story writers, with the result that the contemporary scene is illuminated with nothing like the lustre that burned so brightly, on both sides of the Atlantic, in the 'twenties and 'thirties.

This odd notion takes no notice of the fact that there has been a revolution in the magazine world in this country since the war; or that the general level in interest in the short story, thanks to that revolution and the vast influence of radio, television and paperbacks, has risen; or that really purposeful short story writers simply do not succumb to suppression just because magazines like *The London Mercury, The Criterion, Life and Letters* and *Horizon,* excellent as they may have been, eventually fade away. In fact, discouragement might well be said to spurn writers of the short story. In America it used to be claimed, before the war, that there were something like 20,000 short story writers struggling for recognition and I should be greatly surprised if the figures were not many times larger today.

That the situation in this country is much the same is proved pretty clearly by two astonishing sets of figures: namely the number of entries in two short story competitions run by two Sunday newspapers some four or five years ago. To one newspaper no less than 10,000 stories came rolling in; to the other a mere 6,000. But this is not all. These figures, remarkable enough in themselves, are capped by others even more remarkable.

The staggering fact is that out of 10,000 stories submitted to one journal not a dozen were worth printing, whereas the other journal could claim to have been just a little more fortunate; it, at least, managed to gather together a small anthology of winning entries. I find these figures a source of endless wonder and speculation. The readers of these newspapers were, presumably, a cut above those specialising in scandal, rape and blood-and-thunder. It is even possible to assume, I suppose, that they were literary-minded. Behind them, also, lay an incomparable mountain of inspiration built in the 'twenties and the 'thirties by a body of modern masters, both male and female, on both sides of the Atlantic, who gave to the short story a greater distinction than it had ever known before.

All, apparently, in vain. Prophecy, like lending money to friends, is a mug's game, but when I prophesied in *The Modern Short Story,* in 1941, that the inevitable distrust and dislocation of war's aftermath would surely lead new writers to find in the short story the essential medium for what they had to say, I felt certain I was right; time has proved me wrong. It is true that a certain number of new short story writers, notably Angus Wilson, John Wain, Roald Dahl, Elizabeth Taylor, Ray Bradbury and others, have appeared, but the results have, on the whole, been thinnish and disappointing. There has not even been what Elizabeth Bowen once so aptly called "a minority-fervour".

The reasons, I confess, largely elude me. It would be possible, I suppose, to lay some blame at the door of publishers, who are all too ready to take the short story's unpopularity for granted and in consequence to publish volumes of it in apologetic despondency, not to say reluctant pain. Nor has their eternal opening question to young short story writers, "When are you going to write a novel?" been of very great help. To my mind this is rather as if you signed on a soccer genius like Johnny Haynes and then promptly asked him when he was going to play rugby. Similarly, it seems to me, literary editors are not entirely blameless. Like some innocent watcher at the night sky, hoping to detect an unknown comet, I still hopefully look forward to the day when volumes of short stories, expressions of prose's most exacting and difficult form, will not be strung together for review like links of chipolata sausages or relegated to the bottom of the book page, there to derive such comfort as they can from the chill company of those awful "shorter notices".

Robert Shaw, who is both actor and writer, recently remarked with some pungency that he had come to the conclusion that literary editors as a whole didn't care much for novels; there are times when I think they don't care much for short stories either.

Back to the myths — in particular the one so beloved and fostered by reviewers, particularly so-called intellectual ones: namely that no greater blight can descend upon a writer than that he should contribute to a woman's magazine. This searing insult is even more degrading than the damnation expressed in "I suppose it will please the library readers" (which library, *Times, London,* Municipal or Fred Smith's the tobacconist is never stipulated). This, as I said earlier, is a myth to be demolished: I hope once and for all.

With this in mind, I now present two lists of distinguished writers of fiction. One: Rebecca West, Isak Dinesen, Ludwig Bemelmans, Nigel Balchin, Margaret Irwin, Marghanita Laski, John Masters, David Walker, Robin Maugham, John Wyndham, Ray Bradbury. Two: Scott Fitzgerald, John O'Hara, Elizabeth Bowen, Morley Callaghan, Eric Linklater, André Maurois, Angus Wilson, Somerset Maugham, Ian Fleming, Richard Church, William Sansom, Elizabeth Taylor and William Saroyan.

To which two editors in London falls the distinction of having printed short stories by these and many other writers of equal standing since the war? No less, I tremble to tell you, than Dorothy Sutherland and James Drawbell, editors respectively of *Woman's Journal* and *Woman's Own.* When you add to these names the even longer and more imposing list, including such figures as Graham Greene, Maurois, Pritchett, Thurber and Huxley,

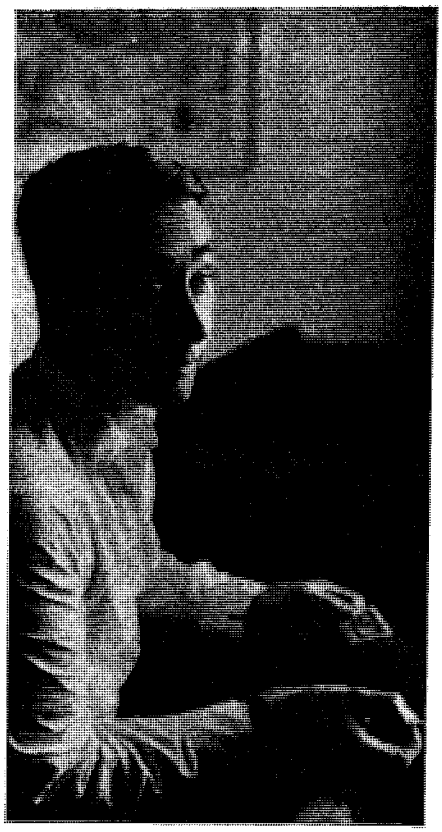


Photo : Mark Gerson

Alan Sillitoe

takes the opposite view to H. E. Bates about the magazine markets

Shorts and Long Shorts

which Miss Sutherland has gathered about her on *Argosy*, our one and only serious magazine exclusively devoted to the short story, it can firmly be claimed that the stigma long attached to women's magazines and their editors is palpably a false and stupid one.

In fact, as I have said, a revolution has occurred in the world of magazines, and a very good revolution, too. A vastly widened field of readers is now able to find its diversion among the work of short story writers, many of whom, when they first began writing, felt themselves to be fortunate indeed if they were published with "minority fervour", in obscure coteries, at a couple of guineas a time. I am one of them; I know.

Yet the fact remains that for all their enviable distinction these lists contain less than ten per cent of post-war writers; the rest were already names of distinction well before the war. Why, then, the failure of the short story, the most felicitous and fascinating of all prose forms to handle, the nearest thing — indeed the natural heir — to poetry: why the failure to attract more new writers? The strange paradox is that it continues to attract new readers, not only of stories in magazines, as we have seen, but also, in spite of the general foreboding of publishers, in books. Twenty or thirty years ago a figure of 10,000 copies for a volume of short stories would have sent its publishers, author and indeed everyone else connected with the book on a wild astronomical champagne spree. Today *Kiss, Kiss*, a work by a comparatively new writer, Roald Dahl, reaches something like that figure in no time at all. Nor is Dahl alone in his happy achievement.

I have long maintained, and shall always maintain, that the short story is a poetic form; it is very much an affair of balance and distillation. At its best it has qualities both lyrical and pastoral. To a sour and abrasive younger generation these qualities, of course, are a little out of fashion. Something more than angry sepsis has eaten into the bone of some of our younger writers and I cannot think that poetry flourishes on the smell of gangrene. I am also unfashionable enough to think that the object of a story is to divert; it is no vehicle for messages, sermons or self-dramatisation.

There may, of course, be other reasons. Perhaps the age's chief distraction, the goggle-box, is in part to blame. Perhaps it is also a mug's game to bother to go through the tough mill of mastering the difficult art of the short story for the prospect of modest cheques when you can write television scripts for fat ones. Or perhaps it's just safer to take a job.

SHORT STORIES ARE A PROBLEM BOTH for the established and the not-yet-published writer in England. One begins to write a story — especially a long one — knowing that to get it printed in a magazine is difficult or impossible. The only hope for the writer here is to sell them in the United States, to such publications as the Partisan Review, the Hudson Review, or one of those many thick university quarterlies whose weight equals that of Soviet Literature and other fat literary turn-outs from the countries of Eastern Europe.

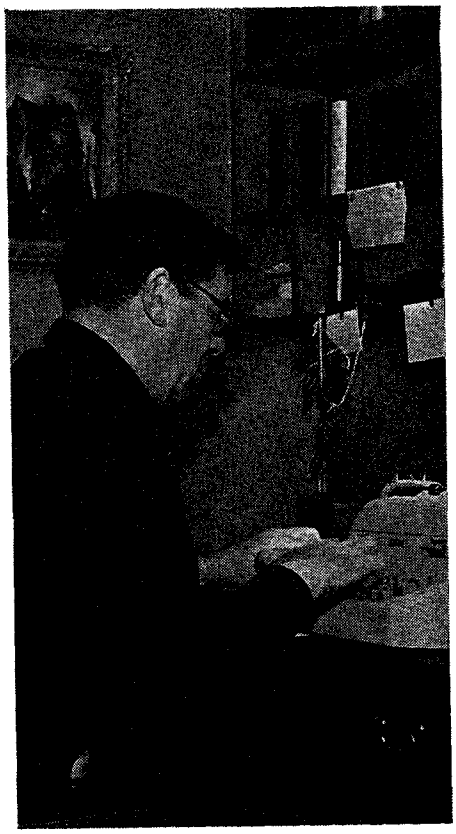
As with most things, England is in the trough, possessor of so few outlets for short stories that it is an art in danger of dying out. If this were not so, the commercial stories in the popular and women's magazines would not be of such an appallingly low and cardboard standard. Certainly there is no A. E. Coppard or Katherine Mansfield today who live and work entirely for the short story — the good short story, that is. Novelists write them from time to time, and have a volume out every few years, but no one makes it the mainstay of his art.

When *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* came out several editors of magazines wrote to me asking for other short stories. Yet many of the stories in this volume had, over the two previous years, been sent to those same magazines and returned to me with the usual rejection slip — or with the comment that they were too long for the requirements of their particular magazine.

This question of length is important. Magazines in England find no room for long stories. The most noted pillars of English magazine society are *Encounter* and the *London Magazine* — and while the latter has at least one story in each issue, *Encounter* often can't find room for one among articles set like damp squibs in the no-mans-land of the cold war, or re-discovered letters illuminating the Bloomsbury atmosphere of the 'twenties and 'thirties. A magazine in some way filling the gap is the *Transatlantic Review* (a New York-London publication) whose latest excellent issues contain many high quality long stories.

The ideal magazine for a writer is one that publishes stories, poems and maybe extracts from work in progress, with less stress on book reviews, articles and essays. Considering the lack of this type of review in England, and the necessity of such magazines to both the writer and the reading public, one would have thought that either a large publisher, or a group of publishers, would get together and finance literary magazines. These could become good outlets for the writer, and they might also stimulate the interest of people in creative fiction. Without them the literary scene will become poor, and publishers may find the rivers of their raw material drying up. The literary atmosphere seems lively at the moment (or at least interesting) but that is because established writers have enlivened it — writers who became published without the help of literary magazines. But the writer who is yet to become established is having a hard time to get his first stories published.

It can be argued that there is an outlet for short stories in more popular magazines, say, like *Argosy*. This may be true — though I would dispute it. I had a 6,000-word story in *Argosy* not long ago called *The Firebug* — a title reduced to



Paul Gallico

shows how a creative writer is naked to the world

Every Writer an Editor

the label of *Firebug* when it appeared last January. Such a magazine presumably believes that its readers are sub- or semi-literate, since in no fewer than 48 different places were the paragraphs shortened by an editor, apart from other minor adjustments to simplify the appearance of the story on the page. These alterations were made without informing me, and I didn't know of them until I opened my copy of the magazine and began reading — by which time it was too late to make effective objection. So a writer's outlets are restricted in the sense that he wants to see printed what he writes, and not what some editor thinks he ought to write.

The ten to fifteen thousand-word short story is a satisfying length to work with. One can be brief, encompass a great deal of "story" and also achieve a certain depth — but at the end of it the question comes to where it should be sent. What I do is save these long stories until there are enough to make a book. Half a dozen go well in one volume. Alone, they are often too long to print in magazines, too long to read on the BBC. Maybe some enterprising LP company will record stories of this length — read by the writer — for I'm sure that people still like to listen to storytellers on long winter nights.

The discursive and rambling short story is a good medium to work in, not only satisfying for an author to write, but also, I feel sure, satisfying to listen to or read. I only make this claim with assurance because I have always liked to hear or read stories of this length, and now I sometimes like to tell them as well. And that, in any case, is far more important than getting them published.

I HAVE ALWAYS MAINTAINED THAT EVERY successful writer is primarily a good editor, a premise that usually drives editors into tantrums when I tell it to them. But when the writer sits down to his typewriter to tell a story that he will offer for sale, he has already fulfilled most of the functions of the editor. He has chosen his subject for timeliness, reader interest, the style of magazine at which it is aimed, the known likes and dislikes of the editor of that particular literary variety show, and the current state of mind of the public. He trims his material and sews his seam in a manner designed to be pleasing to all concerned. I maintain that's editing. The editor in the end merely confirms or denies one's judgment.

The hazards remain large, even after you have what the laymen likes to call a "name", and very often the greater the name, the stricter the standards set by the editor. The writer invests an idea, research, time, energy, and hard labour in the preparation of a story. At the end of three weeks or a month he has some 15 to 20 pages of typescript. If the editor nods "yes", it is worth from one to five thousand dollars depending on who the writer is and how big the demand for him. And if he says "No, thanks," the income tax people will let the writer deduct the market value of 20 sheets of used foolscap and depreciation on his typewriter, and the manuscript can then be used to light a fire. You can't afford to be wrong.

Short stories and novelettes that get into magazines in the class of mass circulation of the *Saturday Evening Post, Good Housekeeping, Cosmopolitan, Woman, Woman's Own, Argosy* or *Today* are counted as successful since if nothing else they have had to meet certain standards which, if not always highly literary, are at least a guarantee that they can be published in a highly competitive field to divert ordinary people. They have passed editorial tests and hence are original, amusing, instructive, entertaining and readable. Working as a professional writer with a reasonable understanding of my medium I have long been aware that there are often more interesting and exciting things about a story than meet the eye, and among these is the story of the story, for there always is one connected with every effort.

Not that I hold with the frequently perpetrated theatrical cliché that the writer *per se* is a romantic and fascinating fellow. His delineation on the stage, hacking away at a portable in the middle of an expensive indoor set somewhere on Long Island, or Chelsea, pausing for thinks, ruffling his fingers through his hair, making *moues* and lighting endless cigarettes, always makes me a little ill. Nothing is quite so static and unromantic as a chap sitting at a typewriter. And paradoxically nothing is to me quite as exciting and fabulous as the preparation of a story or the realisation of the hundreds of kaleidoscopic flashes of the human mind, both conscious and subconscious, not to mention bits and pieces of the liver and lights of the writer that go into it.

For there is no creative product that so exposes the past life, the background, the adjustment or lack of adjustment to life, the fears and foibles, the failings and the strivings of the human being behind it as does writing. Music is an emotional abstract, painting and sculpture in themselves provide a few clues to the personality of the artist. But everything a man

ever thought or did, or was or hoped to be, will eventually find its way into his copy.

Why does a man write a story? For many reasons: an urge, a bite, a gripe, the need to get something off his chest, the desire to support his family, the hope of expressing something beautiful he feels inside him, the wish to entertain, to be admired, to be famous, to overcome a frustration, to experience vicariously an unfulfilled wish, or just for the pleasure of taking an idea and sending it flashing through the air like a juggler with many silver balls, or the dark satisfaction of pinioning that same idea or thought or human experience and dissecting it to its roots.

"To write beautifully of beautiful things" is enough for any man's ambition, but the ingredients that go into this writing are myriad and fascinating. No matter what the subject, the storehouse of the mind is opened and a million relics of a full life are there from which to select and choose. There are human experiences, memories, dreams from both night and day, fantasies, people real and imagined, places one has seen with the naked eye and places one has hungered for in the spirit, scents, snatches of long-forgotten conversations, old and troublesome emotions one had thought packed away, the memory of a caress, dislikes, hatreds, love and fear, serenity and passion, all waiting to help you in the telling of your tale. Many of these are unrecognised, but sometimes one is able to see through a finished story and know how old and how characteristic are some of the things contained therein.

Even superficially the events gathered behind a story are interesting, the whys and wherefores of the background, the actual experience that touched off the idea, and the means used by the writer to add substance and drama to a happening, an episode, a fantasy, or an idea. The writer appears in many guises throughout his stories, and each of them has a meaning and a reason, some valid relation to his character or person or the kind of human being he is.

There is a question I am always asked and it is not confined to the layman. It is: "How do you work?" The content of this question varies from the vacuous probing of the ninny who wants to know whether I have to wait for inspiration and write on both sides of the paper to my colleagues who are as interested in my working hours and methods as I am in theirs.

Briefly, then, I work from half-past nine in the morning until twelve-thirty or one, break three hours for lunch and rest and return at three-thirty for a two or three-hour session in the afternoon.

Up to two years ago when an illness suddenly robbed me of the use of my fingers I did all of my work myself at the typewriter, punching out first and second drafts and then sending the corrected and interlined material to my agents for copying. And, incidentally, the illness which affected the nerves of my hands was occupational. Forty years of bending over a hot typewriter had caused changes in the vertebral column at the neck, pinching the nerves. Faced with a loss of output and recovering in the hospital from an operation to ease the condition I engaged a secretary and in a few months had taught myself to dictate.

The use of my hands was restored, but I am now accustomed to dictating, like it and find that it has increased my output and I can work longer hours. It is also better for my dialogue. Say a silly line to your secretary and even as you are saying it you know it won't do. She may have been trained never to turn a hair no matter what idiocies you might utter, nevertheless you know that *she* knows the line is a dud and you kill it before it has a chance to go any further.

When I was typewriting my own material physically and was working to develop the plot or an idea of a short story I used to talk to myself on the typewriter, rambling on, setting down thoughts and ideas, praising or cursing them, calling myself names, etc. This had the effect of unblocking myself. Original and valid ideas then would float up from the subconscious and present themselves, and I have solved many a difficult story in this fashion. Today I can achieve the same effect by rambling on to my secretary, dictating my thoughts upon the subject. Pages and pages of these notes are then discarded, but they have accomplished their purpose of letting through the story I really want to tell.

Short stories are initiated from ideas, the tickle of an absurdity, "Wouldn't it be funny if . . .", an item in the newspaper, a story told by a friend, an emotion or a character one encounters. The difficulty then is to translate this beginning germ or incident into a fully fledged dramatic plot preserving brevity and unity.

This is the hardest work of all, for it requires thinking. I begin by writing trial synopsis and plot outline, adding, discarding, changing, messing about until a clear line for the beginning, middle and climax begins to emerge, after which a final synopsis is written.

Next, this final synopsis is broken up into scenes and so many pages allotted to each scene and transition of the story. The average length short story is limited to between five and seven thousand words. Five thousand words is about seventeen typewritten pages. This does not give one much room to turn around and calls for all the tricks of economy, brevity and suggestion which is the nature of the art of short story writing.

When I am satisfied that I can tell my story within the allotted space I spend two or three days writing character sketches, setting down all and everything I know about each of the characters in the story. Like the iceberg, seven-eighths of his material remains submerged and doesn't show, but the characters have now taken on life for me and I am able to think and speak and act as they might.

The above is the work part, then comes the fun part, the writing. If the story has been properly constructed, this can be a joy and a delight. It is at this time that one makes little discoveries and adds those small touches which are often the contribution a director makes to a moving picture, and which help to bring story and character to life. After I have written the first draft I let it cool for two or three days, or a week, by which time I can detect the soft spots and weaknesses. The second writing usually eliminates these. I write double space and one side of the paper, margin of twenty, two hundred and fifty words to a page. This makes for quick and easy reading by the editor.

Final corrections are made with pen and the story forwarded to my agent who has it copied and bound and sent to the publisher for whom he thinks it is best fit.

I sit at home chewing my fingernails, waiting to hear if all this effort and planning is to be a success or a failure.

(From CONFESSIONS OF A STORY-TELLER, *by Paul Gallico. Michael Joseph, 21s.)*

The Short Story Today

H. E. Bates

—his article is by way of a supplement to his book, *The Modern Short Story*, the best available on the subject. He also ranks with Maugham and V. S. Pritchett as one of the best short story writers of the century. His wartime *Stories of Flying Officer X* (Cape, 16s.), his humour in *My Uncle Silas* (Cape, 16s.) and his character probing in *The Daffodil Sky* (Michael Joseph, 16s.) shows his wide range of subject and style. His new collection of five novellas, *The Golden Oriole* is reviewed on page 54.

Alan Sillitoe

— sprang suddenly to importance with *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and followed it with perhaps the most brilliant collection of short stories from a British writer since the war, *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*. Two other novels, *The General* and *Key to the Door*, have been published plus a book of poems, *The Rats*. Sillitoe, 31, was born in Nottingham; now lives with his wife in London.

Paul Gallico

—won fame in 1923 by taking a knock-out from Jack Dempsey. Gallico, then a sports-writer, offered himself as sparring partner to the world heavyweight champion. He lasted 1 min. 37 secs. Later he made his name as a novelist with *The Snowgoose* and as a short story writer. Gallico, aged 64, has one big hobby: cats. There were 23 in his pre-war Devon home. His new novel, *Scruffy* is reviewed on page 54.