The Daffodil Sky Study Guide

The Daffodil Sky by H. E. Bates

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Introduction

When "The Daffodil Sky" was published in 1955, H. E. Bates was already well known as a prolific writer of short stories and novels. The story itself is the title piece of a collection that has been described as the crowning achievement in Bates's later career. "The Daffodil Sky" and the collection's other stories have received generous praise from reviewers. As testament to their popularity, no less than nine stories from the collection appeared in the 1963 anthology *The Best of H. E. Bates*. The reputation of "The Daffodil Sky" remains high. Critics have applauded the compelling nature of its visual and sensual images, and the story is indeed filled with sights, sounds, and smells which vividly recreate a rainy summer evening in a sooty English industrial town. The characters who populate Bates's story have been admired for their passionate vitality, a feature which has prompted comparisons between them and those in the works of D. H. Lawrence.

Although Bates's story shares general similarities with Lawrence's work, a more notable literary antecedent for "The Daffodil Sky" is Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *Maud* (1855). This poem provided Bates not only with his story's title but also with a pattern for the plot. Just as the nameless protagonist of *Maud* kills the man whom he perceives as an obstacle to his happiness in love, so too does Bates's unnamed young lover kill a potential rival for his love. The literary relationship between Bates and Tennyson lends support to Bates's acknowledged status as a prose poet and underscores the fact that Bates's subject matter has a universal appeal. "The Daffodil Sky" is about emotions; it is a tale of passion and jealousy, of rage and regret, and it plays out themes of alienation and loneliness which are common to the literature of many ages.

Author Biography

Herbert Ernest Bates was born May 16, 1905 in Rushden, Northamptonshire, England. He left school before the age of seventeen. After brief stints as a reporter and a clerk at a warehouse, he began to establish himself as a writer. His first novel, *The Two Sisters* , appeared in 1926; in the next fifteen years he published eight novels and more than a dozen short story collections. Among the most critically acclaimed works of his early career are his novel *The Poacher* (1935), his short story collections *Something Short and Sweet* (1937), and *My Uncle Silas* (1939).

In 1931 Bates married Marjorie Helen Cox, and they subsequently moved to Little Chart, Kent, England, where they raised four children. Although family life did not have a marked effect on Bates's output as an author, the outbreak of World War II did affect the direction of his work. In the summer of 1941, Bates was commissioned by the Royal Air Force to write works that described the exploits of fighter pilots. Publishing under the pseudonym "Flying Officer X," Bates produced two collections, *The Greatest People in the World* (1942) and *How Sleep the Brave* (1943), which were very popular in England. Other results of Bates's wartime experiences were his novels *Fair Stood the Wind For France* (1944), and *The Purple Plain* (1947), the first of his novels to be adapted to film.

Returning to civilian life after the war, Bates continued to write extensively. Throughout the 1950s some of his most highly praised short story collections appeared, including *Colonel Julian and Other Stories* (1951), *The Daffodil Sky* (1955), *Sugar for the Horse* (1957), and *The Watercress Girl and Other Stories* (1959).

Most of Bates's postwar fiction, however, is written in the novel form. Of his later novels, the five humorous books dealing with the adventures of the carefree Larkin family are the most notable. The first of the Larkin books, *The Darling Buds of May* (1958), was warmly received and was later adapted for television. In his last years, Bates produced a three-volume autobiography, *The Vanished World* (1969), *The Blossoming World* (1971), and *The World in Ripeness* (1972). He was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1973 and died in Canterbury, Kent, England on January 29, 1974.

Plot Summary

Part I: The Return

"The Daffodil Sky" opens with the story's nameless protagonist arriving by train in an unnamed town. A sign forbidding entry to a footbridge that he used to walk across suggests to him that the town has changed since he was last there. His sense that things have changed is confirmed when he enters a pub that he once frequented and finds a new pinball machine and no familiar faces. Falling into conversation with the barman, the protagonist asks about Cora Whitehead, a woman whom he met when he was twenty-two and who used to frequent the pub. The barman does not know Cora. His repeated response to the protagonist's comments about Cora's occupation and her acquaintances is that it has "been a minute"—that is, a very long time—since any of this information could be veri- fied. One of the patrons, however, knows Cora, and he confirms that she still lives on Wellington Street. The protagonist finishes his drink and leaves.

Part II: Happy Memories

Stepping outside, the protagonist is reminded of the day years before when he first visited the pub. At this point the present fades and gives way to a flashback of past events. As a young farmer bringing a cartload of daffodils to market, the protagonist was caught in a sudden hailstorm one April morning. Running to get into the pub, he collided with Cora. His attraction to her was immediate. Once inside the pub, the protagonist realized that he wouldn't be able to get to market by noon, for he was trapped there by intermittent hailstorms. Cora reassured him that all would be well, and the luck with which Cora claimed to provide him held true. He managed to sell all of his daffodils to the crowds of late shoppers who ventured out to make purchases at the market.

The encounter with Cora did seem to bring luck to the protagonist. Full of life's promise, he replaced his cart with a motorcycle—"a Beardmore combination" which he purchased from Cora's friend, Frankie Corbett—and he subsequently invested in a car. As the affair between the protagonist and Cora blossomed, his luck only seemed to improve. By August, the couple was contemplating purchasing the farmland that the protagonist rented from an aging farmer named Osborne, who was willing to sell on easy terms and at a good price. Their combined funds were insufficient, but Cora suggested that Frankie might help them raise the rest. Cora's offer to help with the purchase prompted the protagonist to propose marriage, and she gladly accepted. His happiness, however, was brief. Six weeks later, on a rainy October night, the protagonist killed Frankie.

Part III: Bitter Memories

The story returns to the present as the protagonist walks slowly up Wellington Street toward Cora's house. The sight of a man walking a dog reminds him of how Frankie had appeared on that October night years earlier, and the present scene gives way once more to a flashback. The protagonist was not surprised to see Frankie, for he had learned from Cora that Frankie exercised his dog each evening. The protagonist became jealous and increasingly suspicious of Cora's relationship with Frankie because Frankie had once been her lover and it had taken her a month of close contact with Frankie to secure the loan. When he learned that Cora was pregnant, the protagonist's jealousy reached its height because he could not tolerate the thought that the child might be Frankie's. Although he claims that he merely desired a word with Frankie on the fatal night, the protagonist had come prepared for much more:

He stopped him, and they stood on the pavement and spoke a word or two. He was trembling violently and the air was a confusion of red and black. A few heavier spits of rain came hastily down and Frankie said he was getting wet and hadn't all night to stand there jawing over trifles. "There's no trifle about this and all I want is a straight answer." Then the dog yapped, splashing in a gutter puddle, and Frankie began to swing the crop. He had a sudden blind idea that the swing of the crop was meant for him. A moment later he was hitting at Frankie with a broccoli knife. It was a thin curved knife and he had sharpened it that morning on the grindstone, with Osborne turning the wheel. Then Frankie lashed at him with the crop and then in return he hit out with the knife again. At the fourth or fifth stroke Frankie fell and hit his skull against the iron lip of the gutter, and suddenly there was bright blood in the rain. (Excerpt from "The Daffodil Sky")

At the trial which followed, Cora testified— accurately, the protagonist admits—that his jealousy of Frankie had been of the darkest kind.

Part IV: The Meeting

The story returns to the present with the protagonist standing outside Cora's house at 84 Wellington Street. He is confused about why he has come. He realizes that at the age of forty (that is, eighteen years after the events of the flashbacks) he should neither look for a new confrontation nor view himself as the same man whose dreams died so long ago. He knocks on the door, dreading the possibility that he might kill Cora on the spot—an act that would not be regarded as manslaughter, as his attack on Frankie apparently had been.

When the door opens, he finds not Cora but her daughter. He claims to be an old friend but does not offer his name. When he is prevented from leaving by a sudden downpour, she offers him an umbrella and then decides to walk with him to the bus stop. The protagonist is attracted to the girl, for she has her mother's features and temperament. He lets the bus pass and admits that he has nowhere to go, but the girl does not seem surprised. Her friendliness makes his thoughts race. He wants to tell her about himself,

yet he also wants to dash off and make a fresh start. The next moment he is in deep despair and feeling lonely. He begins to ask her a question but is cut off by the noise of a passing train. The girl assumes that he wants to ask her out, but he states that he wants a drink and asks her to join him. She accepts, and with the rain apparently ending, the two wander off to the pub.

Characters

Barman

The barman works in the pub that the protagonist frequented in his youth. The barman's repeated comment, "that's been a minute," meaning a very long time, establishes the intimate connection between past and present in the story.

Cora's daughter

See Miss Whitehead

Frankie Corbett

Frankie Corbett is a friend and former suitor of Cora Whitehead. His actions are limited to the flashbacks that dominate the middle of the story. Without appearing in the text, Frankie sells a motorcycle to the protagonist, and he subsequently lends money to the protagonist and Cora to help them purchase a farm. When the loan is being negotiated, Frankie receives considerable attention from Cora, and this fact enrages the increasingly jealous protagonist, particularly after Cora becomes pregnant. When Frankie finally does appear, taking his dog for a walk, he is promptly killed by the protagonist. During their encounter, Frankie is rather annoyed that the protagonist keeps him standing in the rain, and he impatiently dismisses the protagonist's concerns about his relationship with Cora as "trifles." When Frankie raises his cane, apparently to discipline his dog, the protagonist feels threatened and stabs him. After a few blows are exchanged, Frankie falls to the ground, striking his head against the edge of the gutter.

Daughter, Cora's

See Miss Whitehead

Osborne

Osborne is an elderly farmer who rents land to the protagonist. His willingness to sell his farm to the protagonist prompts the protagonist and Cora Whitehead to borrow money from Frankie Corbett.

Protagonist

A forty-year-old man, the protagonist has returned to the town where, eighteen years earlier, driven by jealous hatred, he killed Frankie Corbett. The protagonist has returned

with the intention of finding and talking to Cora Whitehead, the woman to whom he was engaged at the time of the crime, and the person he blames for his troubles. Nonetheless, his feelings for Cora are ambiguous. His many memories of her are dominated by positive images of her warmth and sensuality. Only when he recalls his jealousy towards her involvement with Frankie or her damning testimony at his trial does he feel any remote sense of dislike toward her.

His mixed emotions are again evident when he finds not Cora but her teenage daughter. He may very well be the girl's father, but because she is so much like her mother he is strongly attracted to her. As a younger man, the protagonist was a creature of variable feelings, as he experienced the heights of hopeful love and the depths of jealous despair. By the story's end, however, the protagonist's emotions appear to be muted, as he would rather have a quiet drink with Cora's daughter than regard her as a substitute for her mother.

Cora Whitehead

Cora Whitehead was the protagonist's lover as a young man. The desire to see Cora compels the protagonist to return to the town where he spent his early adulthood, but Cora only appears in the flashbacks within the story. As a young woman, Cora exerts a powerful influence over the protagonist, for she is attractive and has an uncanny insight into his thoughts. Her relationship with Frankie Corbett, however, disturbs the protagonist. When she admits that Frankie was once her suitor, and then takes a month to secure a loan from him, the protagonist begins to suspect that she is unfaithful. Cora does little to put the protagonist's mind at ease, saying things like "We want the money, don't we," and "I got to get it the best way I can." Her subsequent pregnancy drives the protagonist to distraction and leads to his confrontation with Frankie. At the protagonist's trial, Cora testifies that the protagonist was extremely jealous of Frankie, a statement which the protagonist describes as typical of her ability to know his thoughts.

Chapter or Sub Header Here

Miss Whitehead Miss Whitehead is the daughter of Cora Whitehead. Bearing a striking resemblance to her mother, it is not clear whether her father is the protagonist or Frankie Corbett. It was this issue that led to the protagonist's jealous hatred of Frankie. She answers the door at 84 Wellington Street when the protagonist arrives looking for Cora, and she accompanies him through the pouring rain on his way back to the bus stop. She is coy, and given her likeness to her mother, the protagonist finds her attractive. Her presence in the final section of the story allows the protagonist to master his anger toward her mother and to escape the loneliness and despair he has felt since being incarcerated for the rash act of his youth.

Themes

Time

Given the movement between the events of the past and the present, time and its passage must be counted among the most significant themes in "The Daffodil Sky." The story's treatment of time suggests that past errors must be accepted and cannot be forgotten. For the protagonist, past dreams of success and love are not distant memories. Indeed, he remembers his past "as if, in the way the barman said, it had been a minute ago." Nonetheless, even if he is able to travel back in his mind, the protagonist is always separated from the past by the effects of his youthful mistakes. Frankie Corbett's death and the protagonist's years in jail form an impenetrable barrier between his past hopes and present reality. He can return home, but he can never return to his former life; blaming Cora Whitehead or simply talking to her about past events cannot restore what he has lost. By having the protagonist find Cora's daughter, a substitute for Cora but not the woman who is so much a part of his past, Bates indicates that the past is irrevocably gone. Time has marched on, and any effort to reclaim his lost years, either through confrontation or reconciliation, must be in vain. It is clear at the close of the story, then, that the only option open to the protagonist is to accept the present and to abandon any plan of picking up where he left off.

Alienation and Loneliness

Loneliness and alienation are central themes that grow in importance as the story progresses. At the outset, the protagonist's alienation is not pronounced, although it is evident when he discovers that the pub that he once frequented is now full of unfamiliar faces. His memories of the past indicate that he could be a sociable man, but they also show that his social qualities quickly faded as he began to distrust Cora. With mistrust came an increased distance between them that continued to grow as he fell prey to his jealousy, that all-consuming "vast dark canker, ugly as death." The protagonist's alienation from Cora increased when he thought that she was carrying Frankie's child and reached its height when she testified against him at his trial. His plan, upon his return, is to find Cora and "to have the last word: perhaps another violent one," a clear reference to his fatal meeting with Frankie in which a "word" led to murder.

The final meeting in the story, between the protagonist and Cora's daughter, confirms that he is truly a creature of loneliness. Standing next to her in the rain, he "was aware of an awful loneliness. He felt sick with it. His stomach turned and was slipping out. It was the feeling he had known when they sentenced him." The story's close reinforces the themes of alienation and loneliness largely because the events of his past still govern him, and even the promise of friendship with Cora's daughter does not offer any firm hope of happiness or social intimacy.

Choices and Consequences

The intimate relationship between past and present events in the story emphasizes the important theme of choices and consequences. The events of the present inevitably result from the choices that the protagonist made in his youth. His present state could well reflect the promise of his youth if he had chosen to trust Cora's fidelity or had not prepared for his "word" with Frankie by equipping himself with a freshly sharpened knife. Choices—"the little things" that he did as a young man—have farreaching effects. It is only in hindsight that the protagonist recognizes how one small suspicion led to another and how minor irritants grew to such proportions that they prompted him to commit murder.

At the same time, the protagonist's present actions do not always indicate that he has learned from his earlier experiences. Because he returns with the apparent intention of settling old scores, or at least opening old wounds, other rash choices and unfortunate consequences seem possible. His anxiousness as he waits for Cora shows how close he is to making a foolish decision, for he has "a terrified and blinding idea that if she opened the door he might not be able to restrain himself but would rush straight at her and kill her exactly as he had killed Frankie." The protagonist's subsequent restraint suggests that he now understands something about the nature of choices and consequences. Although he does not wish to live the next eighteen years in the shadow of another ill-considered act, it is not perfectly clear that he has learned a lesson, for his resolve to avoid violence is not truly tested by his meeting with Cora's daughter. In the end, the story leaves the matter open for debate, and it yet remains possible that the protagonist will again make regrettable choices.

Style

Point of View

"The Daffodil Sky" moves between the protagonist's solitary return in the present and his passions and crime in the past. In both the present scenes and the flashbacks Bates employs a limited, omniscient narrator. This type of narrator relates events in the third person ("he," "she," and "they") and offers insight into the minds of a limited number of characters—in this case, the protagonist's alone. This point of view makes the story more engaging than it might be otherwise. In using this approach, Bates blocks out the thoughts of the remaining characters, and he leaves the reader as uncertain about their motivations and attitudes as the protagonist. This uncertainty diminishes sympathy for the protagonist and magnifies the gravity of his crime, for the reader cannot be certain that he is justified in believing that Cora Whitehead was unfaithful.

If, in contrast, the thoughts of Cora and Frankie Corbett were open to examination and it was clear that the two had engaged in sexual activity, the protagonist would tend to be a more sympathetic character. Under these circumstances, the murder of Frankie could be regarded as the regrettable act of a betrayed lover. The absence of such information, however, makes the murder appear to be the act of an all-too-impulsive and suspicious man. In the end, the truth must remain unknown because the point of view in "The Daffodil Sky" does not permit the reader to form an absolutely flawless picture of events. This ambiguity makes the story itself something like a murder trial, wherein the reader must play the role of a juror who weighs the available evidence before reaching a verdict.

Setting

Both the present and the flashbacks in "The Daffodil Sky" are mostly set in an unnamed town somewhere in the Midlands of England. In his descriptions of the town, which he refers to as black and gritty, Bates captures the essential qualities of an industrial center built around an industry like steel manufacturing. The urban setting disappears briefly when the protagonist takes Cora out to the countryside. This short visit to the peace of the rural world marks the point at which the protagonist is optimistic about his future prospects as a landowner and farmer. The story, however, soon shifts back to the confined world of the town, and its dark, dirty streets make an apt backdrop for the protagonist's jealousy and despair.

The times during which past and present events occur are also unclear, but a sense of the story's time frame is suggested by the protagonist as he talks to the barman in the opening scene, when the protagonist mentions that Cora had lived on Wellington Street "before the war"—that is, sometime before World War II broke out in 1939. Since the protagonist was twenty-two years old at the time and has returned eighteen years later at the age of forty, it seems that the story's present is approximately 1955-the date that

"The Daffodil Sky" was published. The lack of specifics about place and time draws further attention to the general ambiguity that dominates the whole story. Like the protagonist himself, the reader is forced to make inferences or educated guesses based on the evidence at hand.

Symbolism

The title of "The Daffodil Sky" points to its two most important symbols. Throughout the story, the sky not only reflects the protagonist's emotions but also prompts him to remember key events from his past. As he disembarks from the train at the outset of the story, the sky is "dusky yellow with spent thunder," but as he nears the pub and his passions rise, the sky takes on an "unnatural stormy glare." The "pure and clear" sky that greets him as he leaves the pub reminds him of the day in his youth when he met Cora—a time when he too was pure and his conscience was clear. Later, the darkening sky brings to mind his encounter with Frankie and mirrors the jealousy he harbored within. A "darkening brown-purple sky" dominates the scene as he broods and waits for Cora to open her door; when he finds Cora's daughter, however, and the crisis of the expected meeting passes, the sky brightens, becoming "pure and empty."

As the sky figures prominently throughout the story, so too do the daffodils, which are clearly symbolic of hope and life's promise. They are a major source of the protagonist's income in his youth and help him smooth the way for his relationship with Cora, for she is taken with the fact that he smells of flowers. The two major symbols finally intertwine at the story's close. As the protagonist and Cora's daughter walk toward the pub, his passions are calmed, and this inner peace is mirrored by the "great space of calm" overhead. That the scene is now governed by a "daffodil sky" suggests that this state is a merging of personal tranquillity and future hope. Despite this apparently hopeful note at the close, however, ambiguity yet reigns. As Cora's girl lowers her umbrella, she comments, "It'll be hot again tomorrow," and thereby points to the possibility of more stormy weather and heated passions to come.

Historical Context

"The Daffodil Sky" does not directly reflect upon larger social issues, focusing instead on the personal concerns of its protagonist and a handful of other characters. Nonetheless, the story does provide a general image of post-World War II England. Bates's vivid descriptions of the bleak and blackened town in which his story is set reflect the state of England during the 1950s—a nation left diminished both by the cost of its recent war effort and by the loss of its last major overseas colonies. By 1955, when "The Daffodil Sky" appeared, the worst of the daily inconveniences of post-war life —the shortages of food, fuel, building materials, and automobiles— was over.

In order to get the economy back on track, however, England's government had also altered the economy in fundamental ways. Important sectors, including coal production, electrical utilities, health care, and transportation, had been nationalized— that is, taken over and run by the state. Despite these changes and a general improvement in the nation's outlook by 1955, England's post-war economy would never perform as well as those of its major competitors. The reasons for this failure have been hotly debated, but whatever causes are cited, it has become common to regard England at this time as an industrialized nation in decline.

At the middle of the century, England was more heavily urbanized and industrialized than at any time in its past. Roughly four-fifths of the population lived in urban centers, and the various metal industries alone employed four times as many people as agriculture, fishing, and forestry combined. Agriculture itself had also changed, becoming more mechanized than ever before and requiring fewer people even as its output increased. The shifts in population distribution and changes in the agricultural sector meant that small-scale farm operations, like that which Bates's protagonist wanted to run in his youth, were less likely to thrive in the 1950s than they had been prior to World War II.

Bates's protagonist accurately notes that the world is a different place when he returns to find Cora. By the mid-1950s, the days when a farmer could hope to get ahead by selling a carload of flowers and produce at the weekly market were largely over.

As the English economy was changing in the 1950s, so too was the relationship between government and citizen. During World War II, many government departments had been created to regulate and ration everything from food to paper; this increase in bureaucratization remained a fact of life in England long after the war's end. New social programs implemented by the government after the war only added to the size of government. These social welfare services were designed to care for more disadvantaged citizens—the sick, the aged, the unemployed, and the poor—by attempting to humanize daily life and ensure that everyone enjoyed certain minimum standards of living. The socalled welfare state, however, was not without its critics. Its services were funded by higher taxes on the wealthy and middle classes. There were also complaints about the state meddling in private affairs. The general distress at

increased government interference, inefficiencies, and costs were often apparent in everyday conversation in local pubs and in English literature written during the 1950s.

Many of the stories in Wyndham Lewis's *Rotting Hill* (1951), for example, focus on the dullness and inefficiency of the welfare state. Clearly, "The Daffodil Sky" is not an overt protest against the welfare state, but it is apparently set against the backdrop of the new English society of the 1950s. As the protagonist heads from train station to town at the outset of the story, he finds that the old footbridge that he once used has been declared unsafe by some unnamed authority. The closed bridge shows him how times have changed and provides an example of an individual's choices being limited through the interference of a faceless bureaucracy.

Critical Overview

There is not an extensive body of critical work devoted to "The Daffodil Sky", but this lack of commentary says less about the story's quality than it does about Bates's reputation in general. Relative to the number of stories Bates produced, there are simply very few studies of them. Two easily identi- fiable reasons account for this state of affairs. First, Bates was a prolific author. During the 1950s alone he produced four short story collections and many more novels and novellas. Therefore, critics have always had a variety of targets to aim at when discussing his work. (Also, since short stories are by nature limited in size and scope, critics rarely dwell on a single short story by Bates, preferring in general to discuss a number of them in any particular article.)

The second, more troubling reason for the lack of material on "The Daffodil Sky" is that critics have not seen fit to pay a lot attention to Bates's works, despite the fact that they are numerous and popular. The lack of attention Bates's work receives was itself remarked upon by Douglas A. Hughes in his 1982 article, "The Eclipsing of V. S. Pritchett and H. E. Bates: A Representative Case of Critical Myopia." At that time, Hughes deplored the fact that he could not find a single academic essay on Bates's work, and he urged academics to correct this oversight. Apparently, Hughes's advice about Bates was not ignored. By 1984, Dean R. Baldwin could write in his article "Atmosphere in the Stories of H. E. Bates" that Dennis Vannatta had produced *H. E. Bates* (1983), a full-length study of Bates's life and works. Moreover, Baldwin himself would go on to produce his own book, *H. E. Bates: A Literary Life*, in 1987. The quantity of Bates's own work still outweighs the material devoted to it, but the appearance of these studies has gone some distance toward evening the balance.

Despite the scarcity of study on Bates's works, it is still possible to construct a history of the reception of "The Daffodil Sky." Commentary suggests that it has been well regarded since its appearance in 1955. One early reviewer, Edmund Fuller, writing in The *New York Times Book Review*, praises Bates's ability to leave the outcomes of his stories "crowded with possibilities." He notes that there is a "cryptic, pent-up tension" in "The Daffodil Sky." This tension, moreover, is heightened because Bates leaves it to his readers "to divine the meaning" behind the protagonist's encounter with Cora Whitehead's daughter. In *New Statesman and Nation* (1955), another early reviewer of *The Daffodil Sky* collection, Angus Wilson, suggests that the book demonstrates Bates's "penetrating knowledge of people and scenes" and his ability to produce a wide range of stories. Indeed, Wilson's only negative criticism of the collection is that it has a "note of sentimentalism . . . that spoils what would otherwise be perfection."

Recent studies of "The Daffodil Sky" have found much to admire. In *H. E. Bates*, for example, Dennis Vannatta describes *The Daffodil Sky* collection as "Bates's crowning achievement" amongst his later works, and hails these stories for their "assiduous analysis of dangerous passion, ineffectuality, and loneliness." Commentary on "The Daffodil Sky" itself, moreover, has tended to regard its darker features as worthy of direct praise. Thus, whereas an early reviewer like Edmund Fuller politely referred to the

attraction between the story's protagonist and a "daughter of uncertain paternity," Vannatta points straight to "undercurrents of incest and violence."

Similarly, James Gindin, in "A. E. Coppard and H. E. Bates," directs our attention to the question of paternity and incest that hovers over the story, but he also notes the power in its ambiguity. Because nothing is resolved, says Gindin, the story "exists within the slow, heavy, intense feelings" of the protagonist, and "offers a convincing presentation of a man capable of killing for love."

Like Vannatta and Gindin, Deborah Kelly Kloepfer has remarked that Bates toys with the notion of incest. Kloepfer has gone further still, however, and analyzed Bates's extensive use of sexual imagery and noted the many "boundary issues" he explores. She argues that the story is concerned with a variety of violations, from Cora Whitehead's possible infidelity to the protagonist's violation of the law. Even in the limited attention it has attracted, then, "The Daffodil Sky" is clearly a story which evokes in its readers a variety of responses.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Dr. Eggleston is an English instructor at Okanagan University College, in Kelowna, British Columbia. In the following essay, he examines Bates's use of description over action and his choice to leave key issues unresolved to heighten tension in "The Daffodil Sky."

Critics often praise H. E. Bates for his ability to describe the world at large in generous detail. He is renowned for creating decidedly visual stories featuring unfailingly accurate descriptions that immediately impress themselves upon the reader's mind. This quality is repeatedly remarked upon not only because Bates is acutely observant of nature and precise and sure in his use of color but also because he is aware of and draws attention to the finer distinctions between nearly indistinguishable objects. Yet for all his lavish, almost lyrical treatment of scenes, Bates also tends to be what Edmund Fuller has termed "an artist of indirection"; Bates might be "specific about many things," but he does not say more than is necessary about his stories' meanings or outcomes. His plots often offer minimal information and leave the reader to fill in the gaps between what is said and what is inferred. This paradox in Bates's method as a short story writer is particularly evident in "The Daffodil Sky," a story which says very little directly and moves forward in an oblique fashion yet speaks volumes about the characters and incidents that it presents.

Bates's reputation as an artist who constructs impressively visual settings is enhanced by "The Daffodil Sky." From the moment his protagonist comes into view, the world which Bates creates is alive with colors, sounds, and smells. Indeed, it is frequently a challenge to decide whether the nameless protagonist or the background against which he is presented should command more attention. The sky, for example, is especially distracting. It is a significant symbol of the protagonist's changing emotions throughout the story and is forever in flux, shifting endlessly from stormy shades of "dusky yellow" and "copper" through a still more threatening "darkening brown-purple" before finally taking on a calmer, brighter appearance of "rainwashed" clarity. Beneath the sky, in the industrial Midlands town where the action is set, the streets, the buildings, and the air are gritty and blackened with the smoke of passing trains and heavy industry. The scene Bates evokes is made all the more vivid through his appeals to the sense of touch, in his descriptions of "hot wet air" and skin made "cold and wet with splashes of hail," and to the sense of smell, as when he characterizes a back-street pub as filled with odors of "smoke, stale beer, and cheap strong cheese."

Although background details are more fully defined than other elements in the story, the characters who populate the foreground are by no means lacking in vitality. The protagonist is both nameless and faceless, but he is not without passions. He has physical desires that draw him irresistibly to Cora Whitehead, and when he is near her he feels "the flame of her go through him." His passions, moreover, show a darker side of his character, for their power can lead him to jealous suspicion and murderous action. He is quick to imagine an illicit affair between Cora and Frankie Corbett and equally quick to kill Frankie when the opportunity arises. The protagonist's irrational impulses,

however, are also balanced by clear-sighted dreams of future success which Bates carefully articulates: "Suddenly all his life seemed to pull him forward like a bounding dog on a leash. . . . He was going to own his own land, his own house, his own poultry or heifers or bullocks or whatever it was he wanted." The dreams themselves are limited in scope, but their nature is perfectly clear.

Such clarity of dreams is even more evident in Cora, who in a practical manner considers the problems inherent in raising the necessary capital to purchase land. Her pragmatism, though, is but one side of her character, for like the protagonist, she is a creature of passion. Her sensual nature, kisses that are "long, soft strokes of her lips," and her physical qualities, "big soft lips," and "masses of heavy red-brown hair," are the details that remain with the protagonist years after their first encounter. Cora is a lover who has no difficulty "finding [the protagonist's] mouth with instinct, without mistake or clumsiness, the first time." Despite her never actually appearing in the story's present, her sensuality (and Bates's description of it) is impressive.

For all of Bates's attention to place and character, the plot in "The Daffodil Sky" does not progress through a series of precisely connected events, nor does it always provide as much information as the reader might like. Instead, in contrast to the rich coherence of its setting, the story's plot is fragmentary, or as Deborah Kloepfer aptly describes it, "stark [and] stripped down." Moving back and forth between present and past, the plot grudgingly provides material sufficient for the reader to construct a picture of the whole.

Yet even if the plot does allow a picture of events to emerge, it also leaves telling gaps that must be bridged by inference or mere guesswork. One conspicuous gap is the matter of Cora's fidelity. The protagonist believes that Cora had an affair with Frankie, but the truth of the issue is not revealed by the story's end. Some passages seem to point to the answer, as when the protagonist stands outside Cora's door, rehearsing for his confrontation with her. At this point, he wants "to ask why in God's name she had had to do a thing like that," but this "thing" is never identified.

With Cora's faithfulness being left in doubt, another issue of equal significance arises: the paternity of Cora's daughter. Again, however, the lack of evidence that prevents a thorough assessment of Cora's relationship with Frankie also obscures matters here. Inference in this instance, even when based on the material at hand, can only provide an unsatisfactory representation of truth. The protagonist might shake wretchedly as if he were struggling with the temptation of making a pass at his own daughter, but it is never fully clear just who is the father of Cora's girl. The imponderables here—and there are others, such as why the protagonist has returned or why he was apparently convicted of manslaughter when his actions had all the marks of premeditation—are the net result of a skeletal plot structure which contrasts markedly with other elements in "The Daffodil Sky."

Ambiguity might well be a characteristic of Bates's short stories in general, but in the case of "The Daffodil Sky" it is possible that obscurity is the result of Bates's efforts to capture the spirit of Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem *Maud* (1855), the work that apparently provided the inspiration for this story. The similarities between "The Daffodil Sky" and

Maud suggest that Bates had it in mind while writing his story. The broader structure of Bates's story is reminiscent of Tennyson's narrative, for in each work a young man foolishly slays a rival who stands in the way of his love.

More specifically, Bates draws his title from one of the most celebrated passages of Tennyson's poem—a point at which the protagonist invites his beloved Maud to "come into the garden"—and he also picks up a specific image from the same section when he describes several train sheds as looking like "black bats" against the evening sky. The particular subject matter at this point in Tennyson's poem—that is, the invitation from one lover to another to come into the garden—is in essence what Bates's protagonist offers Cora. He is a rural man, a farmer whose plan to purchase a farm provides Cora with the opportunity to escape her urban life and to enter a garden full of daffodils.

That Bates should work from a poetic source is not surprising. In his criticism of the genre he argues that "the short story is a poetic form," and this belief infuses his work to the extent that he has even been described as a prose poet. Poetry by nature is more opaque than prose, and Bates seems to catch that obscurity in the construction of "The Daffodil Sky." Like a poetic work, Bates's story presents a host of possibilities, neither allowing itself to be firmly fixed to any one indisputable meaning nor making its point (for all its use of language to create vivid images) in a straightforward manner. The story is, of course, a prose work; thus, comments about its being "poetic" can never be entirely accurate, but in the absence of a more concrete adjective, the term is quite apt.

Because he chooses to favor description over action and to leave key issues unresolved, Bates turns an otherwise unremarkable narrative into a compelling story. Nothing monumental happens in "The Daffodil Sky," its tension notwithstanding, and in this tense inaction the story leaves a host of unanswered questions in its wake. The uncertainties surrounding his characters' fidelity and paternity, and even those surrounding such legal points as the story raises, provide Bates with an opportunity to multiply possibilities. Like a poet, he can intimate certain ideas—whether unfaithfulness, incest, or any other—without introducing certainties. And, again like a poet, he can prompt his readers to see more in his words than is suggested by their most obvious meanings.

Source: Robert Eggleston, "Overview of 'The Daffodil Sky,'" for *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

Girard is a Ph.D. candidate at Wayne State University who has taught many introduction-to- fiction classes. In the following essay, she examines Bates's descriptions of nature in "The Daffodil Sky," which, she argues, he uses to create a deceptively complex story.

"The Daffodil Sky" appears to be a simple story that is disturbing in its complexity. Bates's style is to present a day in the life of an individual with all of the feelings and nuances that a day can hold. Bates's early works were full of promise, innovation, and ingenuity that marked the modernist movement, but he seldom relied on symbol or metaphor in telling his stories. According to James Gindin, Bates cannot "accurately be called a 'modernist' writer" even though he employed "many of the technical elements . . . that are characteristic of what has come to be defined as 'modernism.'" His writing reflects the ordinariness of the individual and all that can entail. "The Daffodil Sky" is an example of the type of story in which Bates excelled.

At the outset, the reader is introduced to a man as he walks into a familiar town. It is obvious that he has not been there in a long time because he remarks on the age of the things he sees. He seems to be warned not to go there by the sky, which has just finished storming but continues to thunder. He approaches the footbridge and again seems to be warned by a sign that says, "Bridge unsafe. Keep off. Trespassers will be prosecuted." As he continues undeterred, he notices how much the town has changed.

The protagonist recalls the day that he met Cora Whitehead and begins to lead the reader into the flashback that contains the real, or embedded, story. He goes to the pub where he first met Cora and, after making small talk about the weather, asks if anyone knows Cora and if she still lives in town. Receiving an affirmative reply, he recalls the day that he first met her and the circumstances that led him to be in that same pub twenty years later. The reader finds out that he peddled daffodils at the market and that he rented the land where he grew the daffodils. The scent of the daffodils on his hands is so strong that Cora notices at once and lifts his hands to her face so that she can inhale the pleasing scent.

The man becomes enamored of Cora; decides to buy the land that he leases; proposes to Cora; and kills a man. The murder is what brings him back to town and to the pub. The murder is the reason so much has changed. He served twenty years in prison for a crime of passion. Cora was the trigger for the crime because she did not stay true to him; it is implied that she had an affair with Frankie Corbett. In fact, Frankie may or may not be the father of Cora's child. The reader never knows. Bates does not seem to think that those details are important to the story. Even the ending of the story lacks information that would satisfy the reader's curiosity.

He goes to Cora's house to confront her and ask her why she testified against him at his trial. Instead, he meets Cora's daughter, who bears a striking resemblance to her mother. Without saying much more than small talk and with a purposeful avoidance of

telling her his name, she walks him to the train station under her umbrella. The storm ends; they agree to get a drink; and the story ends.

Upon reflection, the reader notes that this apparently simple story is complex in its attention to emotion and sensibility. Gindin observes that "dramatic conflict in Bates's stories is seldom depicted with much complexity. More often, the complexity is internalized." This sets up the ultimate conflict. Bates inundates the senses with a myriad of colors and disturbs the sensibilities through the discordant texture of underlying passions and tensions. Gindin states that Bates "radiates the plain man's point of view," and this is clearly seen in "The Daffodil Sky." This unnamed man with "slow, heavy intense feelings . . . offers a convincing presentation of a man capable of killing for love." This slowness of feeling happens to the reader after finishing the story.

Feelings of incompleteness and frustration begin to develop almost as soon as the reader has finished the story. Deborah Kelly Kloepfer writes that "the importance lies perhaps in a recognition of complexity; appearances are deceptive; things both are and are not what they seem." It is through this ambiguity that the reader begins to understand how the main character can represent the "Everyman" of the early Greek plays. The conflict is not in the everyday, mundane activities of day-to-day existence but in the internalized passion that most people spend their lives learning to repress and control. Reflecting on these emotions, the reader learns how it was possible for this simple farmer to lose control for a brief moment and kill in a burst of jealous rage. Kloepfer remarks that Bates shows how "passion short- circuits propriety or reason" and notes stylistic similarities between Bates and D. H. Lawrence.

Bates tried to depict life as he observed it and, according to Gindin, felt that the author should not embroider it. This presentation of life did not extend to nature or "the English countryside which Bates lovingly describes," as stated by Jean Pickering. Gindin picks up on Bates's love of the English countryside and notes in addition that "Bates was . . . sharply observant of all the particulars of nature, [and] superb at describing weather." "The Daffodil Sky" reflects this detail of the country and of nature through Bates's many references to color and weather. Bates provides the mind's eye with a word painting and colors such mundane things as the notice on the footbridge, which he says is written in prussian blue, and the distant bus lights, which he depicts as a strange sharp green. Such attention to detail seems, at first, strange to readers who are used to either reading stories in an abstract, black- andwhite manner or inserting colors where and how they see fit. In creating this kaleidoscope of colors, Bates makes this ordinary farmer, who cannot remember the color of Cora's dress, more remarkable by his plainness.

While Bates reports in his autobiography that A. E. Coppard told him that "the story could learn a great deal from cinematic art in the use of quick cuts close-ups and other techniques with a sharp pictorial impact" and Gindin acknowledges that film technique influenced Bates's later fiction, there also seems to be a strong musical influence. In particular, the musical form known as the symphonic (or tone) poem is overwhelming in "The Daffodil Sky." The tone poem, as defined by Joseph Machlis, is a piece of music in one movement that in the course of contrasting sections develops a poetic idea,

suggests a scene, or creates a mood. Machlis observes that the tone poem is shaped by literary themes and often emphasizes the influence of nature. "The Daffodil Sky" mirrors the tone poem by emphasizing descriptions of nature, contrasting elements with the inclusion of flashbacks, and utilizing a natural theme of the controlling sky. Machlis notes that the tone poem evokes all of the senses with an emphasis on sight, just as Bates emphasizes sight through his descriptions of color.

Classical music generally contains a major theme that recurs, in variation, throughout the piece. The overwhelming influence of the sky is the major theme that recurs throughout "The Daffodil Sky." Bates signals changes in mood and tone by the color of the sky, whether it be "a dusky yellow with spent thunder," "an unnatural stormy glare of sky," "a stormy copper glow," "discoloured space of sky . . . leaving it pure and clear," "a bright yellowgreen frosty April sky," "mornings that break with pure blue splendour," or the final "calm, rainwashed daffodil sky." The recurring theme is described by Bates in all of its variation.

Bates does not expand his descriptions into metaphor or personifications of nature. He relates the story in a straightforward fashion that is rife with description and color. Gindin notes that Bates con- sidered the short story as "the effectively distilled novel" and even praised "his own powers of compression by rather grandiosely claiming that he got more 'atmosphere' in a sentence than Thomas Hardy characteristically managed in a page." His boast seems rather immodest and egotistical, to say the least, but his claims are backed up by comments from Henry Miller, who declared that "Bates always finds time for lengthy descriptions of nature, descriptions which in the hands of a lesser writer would seem boring or out of place." Miller's observations become plainly evident in reading "The Daffodil Sky." The simplicity in his use of detail, description, and mundane characters serves to emphasize the complexity of the internal struggle all of us must face throughout life on a daily basis.

Source: Theresa M. Girard,"Overview of 'The Daffodil Sky'," for *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2000.

Critical Essay #3

Kloepfer is an editorial consultant and author of The Unspeakable Mother: Forbidden Discourse in Jean Rhys and H. D. *In the following excerpt, she gives an overview of Bates's "The Daffodil Sky," focusing in particular on the theme of appearance and reality.*

The story collection *The Daffodil Sky* has been called the crowning achievement of H. E. Bates's later years; the title story both exhibits the hallmarks of his earlier writing and is colored by an increasing maturity, a sensibility altered by World War II, and a recognition of the inescapableness of time's passage.

Like many of Bates's stories, "The Daffodil Sky" is highly charged visually, marked by "the direct pictorial contact between eye and object, between object and reader," which Bates admired in Hemingway and discussed in *The Modern Short Story: A Critical Survey*. In the first few paragraphs alone, Bates evokes a spectrum of colors (dusky yellow, prussian blue, "a strange sharp green," "stencillings of silver," "a stormy copper glow") not to mention the impact of a farmer's cart full of plums, peas, broccoli, apples, and daffodils. The text is suffused not only with visual images but an intensely sensory contact with the environment: skin "cold and wet with splashes of hail," the smell of "steam-coal smoke and stale beer and cheap strong cheese," the sound of pike "plopping in the pools of the backwater."

Much of Bates's work is characterized by stark, stripped down plots which turn on situations rather than on a series of developed events; this is one reason, perhaps, that his short fiction was often more successful than his many novels. "The Daffodil Sky" takes place within the space of a few hours, the time frame ruptured by a flashback. The color of the sky is the controlling image, the shuttle that moves back and forth weaving past and present. Bates is known for his striking nature imagery, and here it is the coursing clouds, the discoloured sky, and its sudden clearing "fresh and brilliant, shot through with pale green fire" like daffodils, which trigger for the nameless narrator the memories through which his story is revealed.

While waiting out a storm in a pub he once haunted, he asks after Cora Whitehead, a woman he once knew; Bates (whose short fiction, according to the critic Dennis Vannatta, often "works by inference rather than exposition") gives the reader no initial clue to the complexity of the narrator's relationship with Cora. He remembers his instant physical attraction to her in a similar rainstorm many years ago—the "racing flame" of her "running hot through his blood and choking his thinking." One of Bates's recurring preoccupations, for which he has been compared to D. H. Lawrence, is the conflict between passion and repression, the ways in which culture and psychological inhibitions strangle natural impulses or, conversely, the ways in which passion short-circuits propriety or reason.

Indeed, the central event revealed in the flashback is a murder. The narrator, a young farmer, recalls the days when his life seemed full of promise. The man from whom he

rented his land proposed to sell him the property; having insufficient funds, he accepted Cora's offer to go in with him on the deal, an offer contingent on the help of a friend of hers, Frankie Corbett. Overcome with the vision of his future, the narrator rather impetuously asked Cora to marry him and then became "blinded with the stupor of a slow-eating jealousy," which intensified with Cora's pregnancy. Unable to tolerate the thought that the child might be Corbett's, the narrator confronted him one night on the street; the ensuing violence between them led to Corbett's death and the narrator, apparently, was sentenced to jail.

The story ends with the narrator returning to Wellington Street to "have the last word," to tell Cora what he thinks of her having testified against him. He is a man of 40 years now, Bates tells us, his dreams long ago "eaten by the canker." A young woman opens the door. The narrator is struck by how little Cora has changed; he feels "the flame of her stab through him again exactly as it had done on . . . the day of the daffodils." Slowly, however, he realizes that this is not Cora but her daughter. It is pouring rain, and the girl, whose mother is not at home, offers to get an umbrella and walk the stranger at her door back to the bridge where he can get a bus. He accepts, and this non-event, so typical in Bates, is the situation upon which the entire story hinges.

The text becomes filled with sexual imagery— the "rising steam of rain in the air," the heat and thickness, his blood beating in "heavy suction strokes in his throat," the girl's arms "full and naked and fleshy" like her mother's. She is coy and seductive; he is desperately attracted to her even as he considers telling her who he really is. Looking at the "haunting yellow sky," overcome, sickened by "an awful loneliness," he is, apparently, just about to proposition her when a rather phallic train comes "crashing and flaring" under the bridge where they have stopped; the girl waits for it to pass and asks the stranger, whose body is shaking, whether he had intended to ask her out. Instead, the train passed, the storm clearing, he settles for a drink with the girl who is perhaps his daughter, steering clear of the bridge blocked with a notice stating, symbolically, "Bridge Unsafe. Keep off. Trespassers will be prosecuted."

Clearly there is the suggestion here of incest, only one of the many boundary issues in the story. There are many violations: Cora violates, perhaps, fidelity; the narrator violates the law; reality violates dreams; the present violates the past. Although Bates has been compared to Maupassant, his endings are often more ambiguous than ironic, an ambiguity echoed in the title. The reader is left unsure which sky controls the landscape—the "pure and clear" sky and the "fierce, flashing daffodil sun" of the narrator's youth or the dusky yellow sky "with spent thunder" that the narrator finds upon his return to town. The importance lies perhaps in a recognition of complexity: appearances are deceptive; things both are and are not what they seem; past and present intersect, become confused, coexist. Both inner and outer landscapes are wracked by storms of violence, passion, and loss, but nature also offers the "light of after-storm, . . . a great space of calm, rainwashed daffodil sky."

Source: Deborah Kelly Kloepfer, "The Daffodil Sky," in *Reference Guide to Short Fiction*, edited by Noelle Watson, St. James Press, 1994, p. 679.

Adaptations

Although "The Daffodil Sky" is not itself available in other media formats, students might want to view the recent, highly acclaimed television adaptations of Bates's Larkin books to contrast his various tones and styles. The series *The Darling Buds of May* was produced by Yorkshire Television and stars David Jason, Pam Ferris, Philip Franks, and Catherine Zeta-Jones. It is available from Studio BL Home Video (released 1995).

Topics for Further Study

Research the development of the welfare state in England during the 1940s and 1950s and discuss how "The Daffodil Sky" reflects England during the 1950s.

Discuss Bates's characterization of women in "The Daffodil Sky."

Analyze the character of the protagonist. What are his dominant traits? How do they contribute to his fate in both past and present?

Research the English legal code's definition of murder and discuss why the protagonist in "The Daffodil Sky" was convicted of manslaughter. What evidence is there in the text to support this judgement?

Compare and Contrast

1950s: In 1955, the London Clean Air Act puts a ban on burning untreated coal. In 1956, Calder Hall in England begins to produce electricity by means of nuclear fuel

1992: The Prime Minister of England announces the intention to close 10 coal mines out of 31 mines that are not viable economically.

1951: The population of Britain is 50 million people; the population of London is 8.4 million.

1990s: In 1992, the population of Britain is 58 million people; in 1991, the population of London is 9 million.

What Do I Read Next?

The other stories in Bates's 1955 collection *The Daffodil Sky* provide perhaps the best context for the story itself. They also serve as examples of Bates's mature work as an author of short fiction.

Bates's 1951 collection *Colonel Julian and Other Stories*, like "The Daffodil Sky," offers examinations of characters who are disappointed, lonely, and despairing.

Look Back in Anger, a play by John Osborne which was first performed in 1956 and published in 1957, examines the marital woes of Jimmy and Alison Porter, a socially incompatible couple who struggle to get by in a town in the Midlands of England.

Alan Sked's Britain's *Decline: Problems and Perspectives* (Basil Blackwell, 1987) offers a useful introduction to problems associated with defining the social, moral, and economic changes in England since World War II.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *Maud* (1855) is a poem in sections of different meters which treats the relationship between an unnamed protagonist and his beloved Maud. It describes the trials the lovers face, including a fatal duel between the protagonist and Maud's brother, the protagonist's escape from justice, and his ensuing madness.

Further Study

Baldwin, Dean R. *H. E. Bates: A Literary Life*, Susquehanna University Press, 1987.

A full- length study of Bates's life containing commentary on many of Bates's works, including the collection *The Daffodil Sky* .

Baldwin, Dean R. "Atmosphere in the Stories of H. E. Bates," in *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol. 21, 1984, pp. 215-22.

Comments on the manner in which Bates develops atmosphere in his stories and notes that the atmosphere in many of Bates's works clearly distinguishes them from those of his contemporaries.

Fuller, Edmund. "Impressions of Mortality," in *The New York Times Book Review*, July 15, 1956, p. 5.

A review of the first American edition of the collection *The Daffodil Sky*, published in 1956, that focuses on Bates's tendency to express ideas in an indirect manner.

Gindin, James. "A. E. Coppard and H. E. Bates," in *The English Short Story*, 1880-1945, edited by Joseph M. Flora, Twayne, 1985, pp. 113-41.

Argues that Bates's short stories emphasize the plain and ordinary over settings and characters, prefer "country matters" for their subjects, and shun metaphor and symbolism in favor of direct representation of characters and events.

Hughes, Douglas A. "The Eclipsing of V. S. Pritchett and H. E. Bates: A Representative Case of Critical Myopia," in *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol. 19, 1982, pp. iii-v.

Observes that Bates's works have not received the attention they deserve and argues that editors of scholarly journals should encourage studies on underrepresented authors such as Bates.

Vannatta, Dennis. *H. E. Bates*, Twayne, 1983.

A study of Bates's work and life that contains a useful bibliography of primary and secondary sources and discusses the themes, plots, and characterization in some of the stories in *The Daffodil Sky*.

Vannatta, Dennis, ed. *The English Short Story*, 1945-1980, Twayne, 1985.

The three essays in this collection which cover the years 1945-1970 mention Bates numerous times and cite his short stories as being amongst the most significant examples of the genre produced in post- World War II England.

Wilson, Angus. A review of *The Daffodil Sky*, in *The New Statesman and Nation*, November 19, 1955.

An early review of *The Daffodil Sky* that praises Bates for the wide range of his stories and faults him for being too sentimental in some of them.

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Machlis, Joseph. *The Enjoyment of Music*, pp. 102-03. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1970.

Vannatta, Dennis. *H. E. Bates*, Twayne, 1983.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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