

## H. E. BATES

*A Crown of Wild Myrtle. Michael Joseph, 15s., published Oct. 1.*

THE NOVELS OF H. E. Bates can be divided into three categories. These are the broad comedies such as the Larkin series; the wartime and similar stories, sometimes with a very tough streak (e.g. *The Scarlet Sword*), and what I call his sensual stories in which an explosive emotional atmosphere between man and woman is often described without crudity but in a manner more persuasive than that of any other British or American author today.

This new story is in category three. The story is slight but Bates can weave an all-enveloping net for the reader out of almost nothing. An unambitious Englishman on holiday in the Greek Islands rescues a young culture-conscious American tourist from a lesbian vixen. Action is small; it is the descriptions that make the book: 'On the very instant of departure the voice of the guide threw its brassy babble, in three languages, into a microphone, from whence it poured crackling vomit through a loud-speaker.' And there is an eloquent plea about excessive worship of ruins: 'Give me a tree with a few flowers on it or some fruit and you can talk about beauty. But not that callous-looking stone, not that stuff. It's like a graveyard up here.'

'But the spirit of it. The antiquity. The history—'

'History,' he said, 'What's history?'

This may be a slight work but in its reading there is more pleasure than in a 100 other novels which may get more review space. One wonders why H. E. Bates is being so much under-valued by Top Critics at the moment.

R. B.