



Fair Stood the Wind for France

H.E. Bates

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Treacherous mud clutched at the wheels and the Wellington up-ended. End of mission. The great bomber had been giving the crew trouble since leaving Italy. Finally over occupied France, it settles like a weary, wounded eagle on what seemed to Franklin a hard, smooth field. The five members of the crew were welded by the crash into a single whole, one tiny forged weapon in the vast territory of the enemy--weak and ineffectual--yet confident as only men can be whose minds are free. Francoise's family accepted them calmly. In Francoise it was faith, a simple piety so humble, so complete that all the mechanized myrmidons of the Reich could not touch her spirit. In her father it was stubbornness, that glorious pigheadedness of the French peasant who won't be pushed around. In her grandmother it was a kinship with the infinite. Having survived two wars, she remained unmoved by the swaggering vainglory of the Nazi. And in Pierre it was hatred, a hatred so deep that only rarely did it flash on the surface. It was natural that Francoise should be so strongly drawn to Franklin, the pilot. His gentle strength, his sensitive mind, the careful restrained warmth of his emotion found a calm, sure response in the simple innocence and candor of the girl. All through the delirious pain of his torn, wounded arm, Franklin felt the girl's presence like a cool, comforting hand. In the end it was her courage and, above all, her faith which saved him--saved him--not only from the enemy but from himself.

Fair Stood the Wind for France Details

Date : Published January 5th 2005 by Thorndike Press (first published 1944)

ISBN : 9780786272181

Author : H.E. Bates

Format : Paperback 386 pages

Genre : Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, War, Cultural, France, Classics, World War II, European Literature, British Literature

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From Reader Review Fair Stood the Wind for France for online ebook

Laura says

From BBC radio 4 - Classical Serial:

Dramatisation by Maddy Fredericks of HE Bates' classic tale of danger, suspense and romance in Second World War France.

When a British aircrew ditch over Occupied territory in the summer of 1942, injury and suspicion dog their attempts to survive and escape.

Amy says

John Franklin is an English pilot who crashes his plane into occupied France and finds refuge for himself and four sergeants at a nearby farm. Luckily for him, one cool cucumber, Francoise, resides on the farm with her father and her grandmother. Francoise is a smart, young French girl who faces all kinds of adversity, including Nazis, in that awesome French insouciant way, and she isn't at all fazed when five dirty Englishmen pop out of the field while she's feeding her chickens. The men must somehow gain passage out of France, assisted by Francoise and her family. Meanwhile, living in occupied France is no picnic as there are Jerries everywhere, shortages of almost everything, and potential French collaborators lurking about.

This makes the book sound way more adventurous than it is. A lot does happen -- there is the plane crash, Franklin must sneak into town in plain view of the Nazis, there is some gruesome medical stuff, a family tragedy, the escape, and the Nazis being Nazis -- but the book itself is not action-packed. Franklin is anxious to get back to England, but he is very introspective, so the book sort of meanders along. He obviously falls in love with Francoise because she is so awesome, and he isn't above being irrationally jealous of one of the younger sergeants who speaks flawless French; he suffers from intense bouts of homesickness for England; he frets over a serious medical emergency and contemplates a future without flying. There is always an undercurrent of suspense -- will they escape and make it back to England? What will happen between Francoise and Franklin? Will Francoise's family be shot for hiding the Englishmen? -- but it's all very thoughtfully described.

Francoise is the best because every time something dangerous happens, she basically shrugs and takes a long drag of her Gauloises. Franklin is a thoughtful, considerate young man who you realize is only 22 when all this is happening. TWENTY TWO! It continually shocks and appalls me to think of what was asked of young people during the world wars. Yet I remain obsessed.

Judith Johnson says

It's such a long time since I read this, I can't remember much detail! I bought it as my husband was playing the role of navigator in the TV adaptation. I was working for his agent at the time, and when I heard he'd got the part, I bought the book for him as a present. When I got home and he looked questioningly at me, I said "You've got the part!". Always nice to be able to tell an actor they've got work!

Brian Baker says

I became a fan of H.E. following the TV adaptation of his 'Love for Lydia' in the late '70's - curled up with my girlfriend on her parents' sofa, the lyrical romance of it chimed with the way I felt at the time. A couple of years later, ejected from the sofa, I gloomily devoured more of Bates' lushly melancholic rural romances, but when it came to the wartime novels I balked, hence this novel stayed on my shelf for over thirty years. Taking it down a couple of days ago I tried really hard to like it but ultimately didn't get on with the Boys' Own aspect of the story. For me the whole thing reeked of propaganda - bluff British heroism set against furtive French capitulation. As it was written in 1942 this is perhaps forgivable, but seventy years on it grates.

Sarah says

This is one of those novels that was difficult for me to rate. The writing was wonderful at times. My measured view is a four, but it was an engrossing, sensitive, thoughtful portrayal of the Second World War and the lives of those caught up in desperate times.

Chana says

A romance during wartime in occupied France. A British pilot crashes his plane and he and his crew set off across the countryside. The pilot has suffered an injury and becomes delirious with infection. A French family takes them in and helps; this family includes a young woman who falls in love with the pilot and he with her. It is a slow moving book but very tense. Romance set against death and grief. Wartime set against the natural beauty of the French countryside. The tension builds to a crescendo by the end and it has a very powerful and moving ending. Altogether a very good book.

Duane says

This is not your typical World War II novel. It doesn't focus on the brutality and the atrocities that were so much a part of the war. It's a very personal story, a story of compassion, bravery, and love. It's the story of British pilot John Franklin, whose plane was shot down in occupied France, and Francoise, the daughter of a French farmer who hid Franklin and his mates from the Germans. It's the story of bravery and sacrifice by Francoise's family, and of the love that grows between Franklin and Francoise. Just a very enjoyable read.

martin says

A surprisingly beautiful, bittersweet novel that was moving and enjoyable

Got this in a charity second hand book sale years ago, but never read it because World War 2, romance and planes have never been my favourite fiction themes. However, the imaginative title always caught my attention so I finally started it.

I had expected a novel written in wartime to be painfully jingoistic and motivational in that odd "come through adversity to win the war over the culturally less deserving enemy" style. H E Bates' love of Britain (and France) isn't like that. This is a book about people, not peoples. The main characters do have some traits that would've been idealised for each of their nations, but they are individuals not stereotypes. It's an intensely personal romance against the odds of the suffering, fear and chaos that comes from war. War and unknowing fear are the bad guys here - the German occupiers themselves are rarely seen and their brutality is reported rather than described first hand. This indirect experience adds to the fear that really cripples Franklin - nicely contrasted with the simple faith of Françoise.

The ending is at the same time intensely sad and uplifting. A message that in the midst of all the pain and confusion, it is possible for love, faith and hope to survive and in O'Connor's case be strengthened(

Jess says

This is the first English novel I've read that was published *during* the war. And it was nothing like I was expecting - it's not just a pretty title.

Fair Stood the Wind for France is warmly funny and endearing, offering quite a unique perspective unlike anything I've come across before. Okay, so it's unsurprising that the poetic title is quite so poetic, given that it was lifted from Drayton's *Agincourt* - but the rest feels original. The writing however is very different; it's prosaic yet charming, if a little repetitive. The characters are compelling, the banter of the squadron is incredible and the ambience is lovely.

But: H.E. Bates's presentation of women really angered me.

Françoise is the young French girl who comes to Franklin's rescue - the rest you can figure out, I'm sure. Just in case you're unfamiliar with such conventions, let me fill you in: Franklin inevitably develops a really *deep* and *profound* connection with Françoise and falls head over heels in 'love'. And yet, Franklin never actually refers to Françoise as "Françoise". Instead, she's rather unceremoniously dubbed "the girl" throughout the entire novel. I think Franklin called her by her name *once*.

So, despite the language barrier - somewhat compromised by Franklin's rusty yet serviceable French - he decides that he's irrevocably in love with "the girl". I'm willing to go on a bit of suspension of disbelief - this isn't my main problem. I get that this is 'a product of the time' and whatnot, but I cannot help getting angry with Bates's *interminable* focus on Françoise's breasts and how she can't be mentioned without some sort of reminder of her sex appeal. Franklin is *constantly* touching her up and pressures her into what is implied to be some sort of sexual relationship. Let me demonstrate:

Franklin, after removing Françoise's blouse *and* being told not to, whines "*You said you'd do anything for me.*" Later, after said ~~assault~~ tryst, he asks oh so tenderly, "*Did you mind what happened to-night?*"

Did she *mind*? Did she MIND?

'No' *means* no.

Disgusting. Shame, Mr Bates. You were doing really well, too.

Jim says

I finished "Fair Stood the Wind for France" this morning, which gripped me to the last paragraph. I've read endless novels about the war but this was one of the most reflective, one which really tried to take a singular human view of the cataclysmic world events. While it affirmed that life goes on, and even flourishes in such circumstances, that the human spirit can triumph in adversity, it also heavily underlined the "agony of all that was happening in the world". It was very moving in a quite understated way and I'm sure the memory of the themes it addressed will stay with me for a long time. And they were big themes. Love, love of country, romantic love, love of fellow men, comradeship, loyalty, despair and death. Reading it, you felt that living through the war threw people into a life that couldn't be lived under any other circumstances, where things were appreciated anew and ordinary people were forced to think about these big themes and live their way through them. You like to think that it was written so large, and so terribly in the end, with the camps and the atom bomb, that it could never happen again, because the "little people" referred to in the novel just will not let it. But wouldn't we be daft to think so?

Michelle says

Fair Stood the Wind for France is an astonishing novel. It wasn't the run-of-the-mill war novel I was expecting at all, but a lyrical, lovely tale of unlikely love. It grapples with themes of loss, pain, faith and sacrifice. And the writing! From Bates' dreamy opening passage, I was enthralled.

My full review is, as always, on my blog, Book to the Future:

<http://booktothefuture.com.au/?p=1968>

Bree (AnotherLookBook) says

Very engaging story. Review to come!

Cynthia Dunn says

P

S Murdoch says

I don't feel qualified to write a review of this book. HE Bates is suvh a master, it feels wrong even to try. I won't. I'll just say it's wonderful.

Margaret says

Written in 1944, this is the account of a pilot's crash landing and subsequent escape from occupied France. He is badly injured and he and his four man crew set off walking west. They arrive at a farm where the people are friendly and help. There is a girl and the inevitable happens, they fall in love. The complications because of his arm are enormous and the French deciding to riot in the nearby town don't help!! It is historically interesting because the escape route eventually takes them through Vichy France, about which I know very little. I found the style rather old fashioned (not surprising) and at first not easy to read, but the tension is well maintained, enjoyed it.

Mary says

A very moving account of war torn France.

Beautifully written, a compelling tale of love and redemption set against the horrors of war!

LadyCalico says

This is the second WWII novel by Bates that I've read and both have been great reads and somewhat different from the usual characters and plots. He seems to be an author with an abundance of creativity, insight, and sympathy. This was a lovely adventure/romance about loyalty, faith, courage, and humanity.

Trisha says

Set in occupied France during the Second World War, this book was written while the war was taking place which adds an additional dimension of suspense to an already suspenseful story.

The suspense begins early on when John Franklin, the young British airman who is the protagonist of this story, realizes that his plane has malfunctioned forcing him to bring it down in a French field. *"He was aware of all the sound of the world smashing forward towards him, exploding his brain, and of his arms striking violently upward, free of the controls. For a moment he seemed to black-out entirely and then the moon, hurling towards him, full force smashed itself against his eyes and woke him brutally to a moment of crazy terror. . . He felt his left arm strike something sharp, with sickening force, and then the moon break again in his face with bloody and glassy splinters in a moment beyond which there was no remembering."*

The reader can probably predict what happens next: Franklin and his crew make it to a farmhouse in the country where they are hidden and kept safe for a time until false papers can be obtained in order for them to be smuggled back to England. Meanwhile Franklin falls in love with the beautiful young daughter of the farmer, etc. etc. But even though the rest of the story follows predictable lines I didn't mind at all because what I found most appealing about this novel was how it focused on what it was like for ordinary people who were living their lives as best they could despite the horrors of war.

This novel doesn't focus on graphic battlefield descriptions or on the atrocities that took place during WWII. Nor does it dwell on what happened when innocent men, women and children were tortured and killed in retaliation each time French citizens engaged in acts of sabotage and resistance. Instead the reader is given a glimpse of what life was like in Nazi-occupied France and the courage of the French people who were willing to take amazing and enormous risks because it was the only way they could fight against the Nazi regime.

Sandy says

By the time that this novel was published in 1944, H.E. Bates had been publishing all manner of literature for almost 20 years. Writing seems to have come naturally to him. His second novel (the first having been discarded) was published when he was a mere lad of 20. When the Second World War broke, he had another eight published novels to his credit, along with children's books, short stories, and essays. Since the Air Ministry recognized that readers of the time would prefer to read stories about the lives of service members than facts and figures about military manoeuvres, Bates was commissioned by the Royal Air Force to fill that need.

This novel is a fine example of the kind of story that interested Bates's readers during that period of history, and it is my favourite kind of war-time novel. The blood and gore is minimal -- more implied than explicit. The story offers a pleasant balance between beautiful, peaceful pastoral scenes which help the reader to relax and sink into the scene and action scenes which keep one turning pages quite ferociously.

The initial cast of characters is whittled down early in the story to focus on one injured English pilot and the farm family in rural occupied France who hid him and nursed him back to health. As the story progresses, the reader (and in fact the pilot himself) grows to admire, respect, and even love this French family for their unshakeable faith and courage in spite of the horrors that they and their friends and neighbours had endured.

The ending did not come as a surprise to me, and to some readers it may seem like a disappointment, perhaps slightly "too" happy. It did, however, in the final paragraphs bring to the fore another poignant truth about the lengths to which a person may go for the sake of the safety and happiness of a loved one. And it is probably the kind of ending which appealed to the reading public in 1944!

I would recommend this novel very highly to readers who enjoy that era of gentle but captivating literature. It tells a spell-binding tale without grabbing you by the throat and thrusting shocking scenes in front of you. For that reason, I would happily read it again -- something that I rarely do!

Mij Woodward says

A love story, an adventure story, the effects of WWII, a gripping thriller, a comrade's poignant sacrifice. All rolled up into one.

Not until the final two pages did I learn the fate of the two main characters.

The author, H. E. Bates, was a Squadron Leader in the R.A.F. (England's air force). So he had firsthand knowledge of things. Some of his published works then bore the pseudonym "Flying Officer X".

Fair Stood the Wind for France was published a year before VE Day. The war was still raging as Bates wrote his story.

Maybe that explains why I felt like I was there with the fallen pilot, Franklin, and his struggles. It all felt very real to me.

Remarkable.
