Buck, Pearl S. ***Fourteen Stories***
Day. Oct. 2, 1961. 256p. $4.00. (IIa)

Pearl Buck has always seemed to be a writer of medium talent, a good craftsman capable of putting characters on paper that come alive, and telling a story that holds the reader's interest. Nor are these stories any exception. All of them have been written before 1943 and the present, and four of them have never before been published.

The author has been preoccupied for most of her writing life with the problems of the people of the East, as well as the solution to Western man. These stories continue that interest, being a combination of stories about China and America.

"The Beauty" is a clever little tale showing the wisdom of the Chinese women in manipulating their men. In "Enchantment" we see that beauty is not the greatest asset a woman can have; there is a certain quality that can do much more good, and bring her more happiness. Aline and her Japanese daughter-in-law have different techniques in the art of holding a husband, as is delightfully portrayed in "With A Delicate Air." It is no easy matter to delineate a person in a short amount of space, make him or her believable, and, if possible, memorable. "Beyond Language" accomplishes this by depicting the subtle way in which Wu Liang's father saves his son's marriage.

The writer has varied her subject matter a great deal, moving from a story about a Communist Commander and a Commissar to the story of the young American, Tim, home from the war, maimed, and wondering how to "Begin to Live." "The Engagement" is one of the most interesting stories, dealing as it does with a lovely attractive couple who are just about to be married. Unknown to one another, both wishes to be released from the commitment. A too-possessive mother is presented in "Gift of Laughter," but it would seem she realizes her mistake. Whether she could change drastically enough to affect her son's happiness is questionable. "Death and the Dawn" is a poignant story of the death of a father, surrounded by his loving family. The effect it has on the patient beside him who hears the conversation is the unusual part.

If none of these stories will live forever, at least they all make clean, enjoyable, light reading. That was most probably the purpose for which they were written.

Mary Elizabeth Reedy,
Omaha, Nebraska

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Boyd, Dean ***Lighter Than Air***
Harcourt, Brace & World. Sept. 13, 1961. 249p. $3.95. (IIb)

Dean Boyd has named his first novel very appropriately. *Lighter Than Air* is just that, and it provides delightful reading with an airy brand of humor and a rich variety of outlandishly entertaining incidents.

Against the background of the Second World War, the book relates the erratic and highly improbable tale of a U. S. Navy blimp squadron. More particularly, it is the story of Commander Maxwell Burns, Lt. Carl "Beaver" Nelson, and Navy nurse Jean Holt. The two men, destined from the first to clash, first meet in 1942 at South Minster, Massachusetts, and their initial antagonism builds throughout the squadron's transfers to three continents. Their contrasting personalities are matched by opposing service attitudes. Burns is a dedicated soul and has a special attachment to one particular blimp—the King Seventeen. Nelson, on the other hand, shows the Navy only a bored toleration, and his affections are restricted to Jean.

The sober Burns-Beaver theme, however, is abundantly surrounded by all sorts of wild incidents. At South Minster these include the delivery of a drunken Santa Claus to a local orphanage, an accidental smashing into a church steeple, and the transfer of a strip teaser from an officers' New Year's party to an enlisted men's gathering.

Shortly thereafter the squadron is assigned to North Africa as the first overseas blimp unit. Here Burns becomes involved with a highly impractical plan for submarine detection and destruction that is more comical than orthodox or effective. The squadron's earlier antics, moreover, persist on a test flight over the Algerian countryside when Beaver and his crew impulsively decide on inspection of a Sultan's harem. Unfortunately the blimp becomes caught on the minarets of the harem in a real comic highlight, and at the Sultan's request the entire outfit is transferred out of Africa.

Trinidad comes next, and there Burns finds his beloved K-17. The reunion is curtailed, however, by the blimp's being presented as a gift to Brazil. Burns is assigned to deliver the airship, and enroute it develops engine trouble. Against his commander's orders, Beaver attempts to fly the blimp closer to the coast and thereby incurs a crash landing in the jungle. After their rescue, Beaver is reunited with Jean, and Burns relents on his original intention of court martial. Instead, believing there could be no greater punishment, Burns turns leadership of the squadron over to Beaver in a fitting conclusion.

The improbabilities of the plot are apparent. The merit of the book, however, lies in its lack of pretension to credibility and a willingness to center interest on its series of madcap adventures. Partly as a result the main characters become a bit stereotyped: Burns is the familiar irascible captain; Beaver, the dashing, nonchalant prankster. Letters from the supporting cast are intermingled as a narrative device, and they add interest without ever becoming a prominent feature.

The book has fun that would appeal to almost any reader. The language, however, has the outspoken bluntness of military life and necessarily limits its suitability to adults.

Eileen Bruch,
John Carroll University,
Cleveland, Ohio

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Bates, H. E. ***The Enchantress***
Little, Brown. Oct. 10, 1961. 206p. $4.00. (IIb)

These polished and civilized short stories constitute Mr. Bates' twentieth book, and would establish if that were necessary his already secure reputation as a literary artist of unusual competence.

The locale of the English rural counties, familiar to readers of *The Darling Buds of May*, forms the background for several of these stories. "Daughters of the Village," a tender, earthy picture of farm women, pausing in their brutal work and ribald talk to enjoy a baby,

and "Where the Cloud Breaks," a pathetic story about an old retired army colonel who struggles to maintain his dignity despite a confused mind and a failing memory. The locale is the same but the rollicking humor of *The Darling Buds of May* gives way in these stories to an ironic compassion for the human situation.

The tenderness one remembers as an undefined fragrance from *Fair Stood the Wind for Frances* and *The Purple Plain*, is caught again in the story of "Thelma," an ignorant chambermaid who took seriously the empty promises of a traveling salesman, and innocently sought the image of the unreal love during a lifetime of casual affairs. There is tenderness also, and a wry wonder, almost a Mona Lisa smile, in Mr. Bates' portrait of "The Enchantress," a lush little slum girl with a chameleon talent for adapting herself to her lover—whether he be a respectable business man, three times her age, or an irresponsible young play boy, or an Anglican minister or an American army colonel. Bertha was not insincere—she was only accommodating, and thus quite enchanting.

Homosexuality is suggested with consummate delicacy in two of the stories. "Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal," which depicts the hurt and bewilderment of a simple woman in her encounter with the waspishness and apparent kindness of a strange man, and "The Snow Line," a classic evocation of an innocently inverted person, as well meaning as he is abnormal. The resonance of this story, so deceptively simple, is reminiscent of Thomas Mann's little masterpiece on a similar theme, *Death in Venice*.

So long as literate, economical, unprecious style is appreciated, so long as irony and compassion are recognized, these stories of H. E. Bates should continue to be cherished.

Genevieve M. Casey,
Detroit Public Library,
Detroit, Michigan

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O'Casey, Sean ***Behind the Green Curtains***
St. Martin's. Sept. 21, 1961. 157p. $2.95. (IIa)

In this country it becomes increasingly difficult to evaluate properly the verbal fireworks of the Irish dramatist Sean O'Casey because his works are little performed in the theatre in America. The plays are studied, many essays, theater thesis are collected on library shelves, but there is a dearth of production that might lead to one angle of evaluation through mass communication. With the fashionable prominence of the current international *avant-garde* playwrights (Ionesco, Genet, et al.), O'Casey remains an unknown factor of domination in the theatre world.

The dominating expression of O'Casey's writing is spleen. It is vigorous and turbulent in its fantasy; that he has chosen the Irish *genre* to air his grievances is secondary. Theatre critics galore have condemned him, and many have rushed to his defense, and the publication of three new plays becomes at least, an event. Time will tell and judge the importance of *Behind the Green Curtains*, *Figuro in the Night*, and *The Moon Shines on Kylenamoe*. They are sociological experiments, and add to his often expressed intentions to expand dramatic realism to a truer flamboyance of the theatrical art. Tidy packages of the commercial theatre are not for him. The result has been, and is, an inimitable juxtaposition of contrasts that ends in an unique vitality and sophistication. In other words, any O'Casey play, in all his progressive periods of political rebel, the Irish war period, anti-war efforts, ideological acceptances, anti-puritanism, must be read with an open mind.

The longest of these plays, *Behind the Green Curtains*, is in three scenes, a gateway of a churchyard, and a sitting room with green drapes. The curtains supposedly represent various aspects of Irish Catholicism. Behind the safety of the green curtains, a group of artists and intelligentsia, and their patron, meet to plan a demonstration which would serve as a boycott of a demonstration planned by the local Church. The Church is condemning the marriage of a Catholic to a Protestant. A show of force, a few words and tea from the Bishop convince some of the artists of the error of their ways, while three of the minor intelligentsia maintain their convictions of defiance. The opening scene between two elderly women in the churchyard is pure O'Casey vaudeville, a biting humor permeates the talk of the conspirators and its anti-clerical ironies result in only a macabre glow.

Figuro in the Night is a two scene flight into fantasy, in which O'Casey poses the question of a state of puritanism which will eventually destroy the Irish race. It is dedicated by the author "To the Ferocious Chastity of Ireland" and consists of "two scenes eloquently and humorously related, but vilely and maliciously inspired and created by dangerous and unseemly influences emanating from and begotten in, the pernicious confines of atheistic and communistic lands." The author does have a way with words, but the clarity of the blather is obscured. The mysterious appearance of an indecent statue as a Dublin fountain creates a two-fold disturbance. The quavering voices of the old men and women who preach the chastity cling to the Cross and the Obelisk hung with red poppies (war? state?) as the youth of the land, in song and dance, engulf the countryside in a new freedom, inspired by the indecent statue.

For comic relief, *The Moon Shines on Kylenamoe*, is a one act farce set on a railway platform in a small remote village. When the unheard-of night train stops at the village, consternation results. The passenger who alights is a special envoy from the Foreign Office, seeking the English Prime Minister who is vacationing nearby. While the train is held up for an hour, a glittering comic discussion occurs between the signalman, train crew, villagers and irate passengers. The Foreign Office visitor becomes lost in the farcical *brouhaha* but a happy ending results through the kindness of an elderly village couple. It could play well and give an audience many vibrant moments.

These are songs of an old minstrel, some happy, some bitter, and all of them experimentally odd songs in the form of a play.

Judson LaHaye,
Montebello, California

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Coward, Noël ***Waiting in the Wings***
Doubleday. Oct. 6, 1961. 134p. $2.95. (IIa)

If anyone knows his way around the theatre it is sixty-one year Noël Coward who, since his singing debut at the age of eight, has been successful as a playwright,