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'Not only a play about a complex fighter pilot, but a play about all of us and all our complexities'

## 'The Day of Glory'

On Monday evening at 9.30 the BBC will present in all the Home Services a new play by the novelist and short-story writer H. E. Bates ('Flying Officer X'). The author, a Squadron-Leader in the R.A.F., tells here how he wrote his play and explains its theme

I WROTE *The Day of Glory*, a full-length play in three acts, in ten days in the winter of 1943, some months before I began work on *Fair Stood the Wind for France*, and I have always regarded the two books, one a play and the other a novel, as expressions of the same creative mood. At that time I had been in the R.A.F. for eighteen months, spending periods of up to three months in bomber stations and up to five months in fighter stations on the job of getting material for those short stories which later appeared under the pseudonym of 'Flying Officer X.'

That I had to spend a rather longer time on fighter stations than on bomber stations is significant. I have always found the fighter pilot a complex and, in a way, a discouraging person. He is the most autocratic, the least democratic, of all flying men. He is the last survival of the individual warrior; his weapon is the most powerful ever to be put into the hands of a fighting man; the element in which he fights his battle is a new one in the history of war. These things help to make him, at least in my experience, not an easy person to get at. The men of Bomber Command were broader in their friendliness, their comradeship, their democracy, their lack of humbug. They were not bothered by a legend. By 1943 the fighter pilot had become bothered by a legend already three years old; the Battle of Britain was something the newspapers would not allow him to forget. Whether because of this or not I do not know, but at the end of five months I felt that I had learned rather less of fighter

pilots than I had learned of bomber pilots in five days. *The Day of Glory* is a play about a fighter pilot. But make no mistake; it is something very much more than that. It is no domestic comedy; it is a play about a revolution of which, in my view, we have not yet reached the vortex. It shows the impact of that revolution—expressed already in my lifetime by two wars and a hideous fantasy of political mania in Europe—on three generations of ordinary middle-class English people. It shows what war did to the generation of our fathers, what it is doing to the generation of today, and what it may do in still more hideous and destructive terms to the generation of tomorrow.

In depicting these things *The Day of Glory*, I must warn you, does not compromise. You will see a whole household—typical of all too many households in the country today—ripped from top to bottom by what appear to be the events of a single day. But what happens is really far more than that. This single day is, in a way, the culmination of a whole era. This play brings together the past, the present, and the prospect before us; and it brings them together in terms that are sharp and perhaps even cruel.

I have spoken of it as being no domestic comedy. Nor is it a domestic tragedy. It is a universal one. It is not only a play about a complex fighter pilot, but a play about all of us and all our complexities; about our loves and our wars and our sacrifices and our pain and all the futility—unless we change our hearts—of all our days of glory.