

**Among the Dahlias.** By William Sansom. (The Hogarth Press, 15s.)

**Winter's Tales (3).** (Macmillan, 18s.)

**Modern Irish Short Stories.** (O.U.P.: World's Classics, 7s.)

**Gilberte Regained.** By Philippe Julian. (Hamish Hamilton, 13s. 6d.)

**Sugar for the Horse.** By H. E. Bates. (Michael Joseph, 12s. 6d.)

**Rachel Weeping.** By Shelley Smith. (Hamish Hamilton, 13s. 6d.)

WILLIAM SANSON'S formula is to take commonplace people, put them in a faintly bizarre setting, and then chronicle the resultant muddle. A low-grade stockbroker, let us say, is sent for two days to Hamburg, makes a small fortune (with the firm's money) at roulette, and has it all stolen by a night-club hostess who looks like his mother. If Mr. Sansom is having an off day, we are then shown the stockbroker applying in vain at the British Consulate, to a snooty secretary from a minor public school, for the money to get himself home; but then Mr. Sansom is too competent to have many off days, so that generally the hero is just left sitting in the night-club toilet remembering his mother's funeral. This formula, variously and quite pleasingly applied, accounts for most of the stories in *Among the Dahlias*, many of which have already appeared in *Encounter*, *The London Magazine*, et al. This fact guarantees their quality, but also suggests that one a month is enough.

As it happens, Macmillan's third collection of *Winter's Tales* contains a story by Mr. Sansom ('Old Man Alone') which is far superior to any in Mr. Sansom's own book. A moving account of an old soldier living alone and *in extremis*, this little piece is a long way the best of a tolerable but indifferent selection. By this time the annual appearance of *Winter's Tales* has come to resemble Family Christmas—anticipated with foreboding, it isn't really too bad after three gins and a bottle of Pommard. With slightly alcoholic forbearance, therefore, let me just say that there is a neat little literary exercise by Noel Blakiston, an agreeably turgid affair called 'Poltergeist' by C. D. Heriot, a rather touching tale ('The Black Madonna') by Doris Lessing and an appalling piece of whimsy from John Hodgson. There is also Iris Murdoch's 'Something Special,' which I kept as a treat till last: good quality chocolate all right, but a dreary old nut in the centre.

Mr. Frank O'Connor's selection of *Modern Irish Short Stories* covers the ground from George Moore to Elizabeth Bowen. Mr. O'Connor believes that 'the Irish Short Story is a distinct art form.' If this is merely to say that Irish stories have their own flavour, it is well enough; for I found (rather to my annoyance) that these stories do have the 'haunting Irish poetry, melancholy and humour' which the dust-cover claims for them. But we simply cannot have the Blarney Stone set up as a rival institution to the Pierian Spring. So let it be said that this volume is readable and racy, eloquent, elegiac and evocative, Irish, in a word, to the pith; but let it also be said, very firmly, that even on this showing short stories from Ireland no more constitute an 'art form' than do stories from the Isle of Wight.

Philippe Julian's book illustrations, like most book illustrations redundant, have nevertheless always been witty, waspish and pretty. All of this applies to the seven stories in *Gilberte Regained*, which concern the remnants of the world Proust lived in and wrote about, and, more significantly, the thrusting middle-class students of Proust

who use their knowledge to crash into that world. M. Julian evidently envisages himself somewhere in all this, though quite on whose side or in what capacity he does not reveal. But are there any sides left to take? The Proust Game has been played, one would have thought, to the very last coup. The impression is of M. Julian going 'banco' against himself in an empty casino. But then again, despite the absence of both croupier and contestants, the fittings and M. Julian are still very elegant: he loses his own money to himself like a gentleman and collects it with a pretty turn of the wrist. In short, he is an observant artist and a witty writer and seems to have been lucky in his translator. But if the cleverness of it all tempts one to pretend that this rigged-up game is really valid, then it is his sheer malice by which M. Julian finally triumphs—malice, delicious and all-embracing. It comprehends the sleazy and parsimonious crew Proust described and the refined silliness of the academic toadies who slither into the drawing rooms behind Proust's ghost. It also gives timely suggestion of just how tiresome, spiteful and nasty was Marcel himself.

*Sugar for the Horse* is a series of heavily stage-managed anecdotes about 'my Uncle Silas,' a rural bore with a colossal thirst (useful for the stage-management) and other attributes such as 'an eye for a wench.' *Punch*, 1900, in tone and taste, save for a few rather prickly improprieties.

Shelley Smith has written three long short stories about children. As the title, *Rachel Weeping*, suggests, these are linked by the theme of the archetypal mother mourning for her young in their suffering. All I can say about these pestilential adolescents is that I'm delighted by their suffering and like to think of it as being indefinitely extended beyond the covers of the book.

SIMON RAVEN

## What the Jester Saw

**Hitler: The Missing Years.** By Ernst ('Putzi') Hanfstaengl. (Eyre and Spottiswoode, 30s.)

HANFSTAENGL knew Hitler well as a friend, though not an intimate one, through the relatively 'unknown' years from 1922 to 1933. He had two functions, one to sooth the Führer's soul by playing Wagner on the piano, and the second to sooth the international press by toning down the implications of Hitler's domestic and foreign policy. He had access to Hitler in many of his more private moods, and he saw the Führer and his myrmidons from close quarters. Putzi was hardly a serious person; he was a smoothie with the foreign journalists and a court jester in the Führer's household. He was not an unintelligent man but this book hardly reveals him as a very honest one.

Putzi took the dubious course of dictating his 'memoirs' to Mr. Brian Connell; it is difficult, therefore, to detect the relative influences of Mr. Connell and of Putzi. Moreover, he quotes at length remarks of Hitler dating back thirty years, but never indicates whether or not he is working from notes taken at the time or even at all. His integrity is also open to suspicion on account of the secretive manner in which he refers to his own role in sending his journalist rival, Kurt Luedeké, to a concentration camp.

The book undoubtedly throws some light on such obscure points in Hitler's career as the *putsch* in November, 1923, the role of some members of the Bavarian entourage and the negotiations prior to the accession to power on January 30, 1933. But Putzi is much more at home in speculating on the background of Hitler's sex life.