

through Time' isn't remarkable except in dealing with a hotel bedroom scene with more than the usual modern freedoms. It's not only direct about sex, but brings in a variety of possible attitudes to it - erotic, detached, ironic, low comedy and classical generalisation. Whether this is a sign of a promising writer is less certain; it could be only a sign of facility.

Obviousness can be quite as much of a drag as obscurity. *The Spike* is an obvious novel about Fleet Street which sets out to correct all the others. The story is about one of the short-lived editors of a popular daily - his troubles with the proprietor, and women, and the pushing fellow under him, and with news itself. In a foreword Mr Forster maintains that the generic character of journalists is more to the point than what they are as individuals; 'jobs create people,' he says; but he doesn't do much to make it an interesting observation. Ted Lewis's colloquial (nearly all dialogue) first novel, about art college in the North-East, is a little more out of the way, but more of a muddle. It isn't clear how much of a shit the young narrator is supposed to be, and when he falls for about the only girl in the college who won't sleep with him - and accordingly has a prim line in conversation - it isn't clear either if one has to take this for a redeeming passion. The odds are one's supposed to.

In spite of some feeling for jobs of work, technicalities and English farmland, the new instalment of Henry Williamson's book about Phillip Maddison is as depressingly unrealised as ever. Though Phillip promises himself a period of withdrawal in which to write presumably just this work, the result is a half-novel the size of dozens of whole ones, in which everything good, and for that matter nearly everything bad, still looks as if it comes straight from the original journals. It's clear about public events - funeral of George V, Nuremberg rally, Mosley (nominally disguised as Birkin) - but deeply unclear about what's happening to Phillip himself. Various women throw themselves at him, to his apparent unconcern. But the main trouble is that Phillip's half-baked ideas come fully into view: the ex-serviceman grievances and the growing admiration for Hitler. Here are SA guards who 'seemed to have the spirit of English gentlemen who had transcended class-consciousness. There was no arrogance, but a tranquillity about them.' Phillip voices his mistrust of civilisation by dwelling on such matters as the pollution of trout streams; about what was really wrong he's a complete blank.

Short stories necessarily deal with brief encounters, but H. E. Bates works the device

hard. Sad or bonhomous, the encounters in *The Wedding Party* are played as self-contained, privileged moments; nothing hangs on them or is exposed by them. The effect, in spite of delicacy in the writing, is desperately sentimental. A man meets a girl 'with death in her heart' at a German wedding-party and might have run off with her to Venice; a discontented woman after an early-morning pursuit of a neighbour's budgerigar suddenly feels 'perfectly, perfectly happy'. The sadness, the happiness, aren't merely precarious - they're so fabricated by and for the story that they're false as well. *The Fraud* is a synthetic, unfashionable sort of fable. The stranger who tells his story to a shopkeeper's daughter in Paris at the turn of the century hints at homosexuality and impotence while retailing the legend of Cupid and Psyche. Found dying on the doorstep as Rosette is going to a ball, he has vanished by the morning, having changed the lives of the Piou family - who are themselves, however, as mysterious as the stranger. This is one of the few works of an Austrian who began writing in Paris in 1910, acted with Reinhardt and returned to Vienna to paint; it could be a libretto awaiting the full treatment by Richard Strauss. It has curiosity value in connection with that era, but I don't know how it has survived it.

ROBERT TAUBMAN

Anatomist

I'm tired of your dying
In so many ways at once.

How can I tell which of the pools
You are drowning in
I should plunge into -
Who am no swimmer anyway?

When it's all over, I'll be
Resurrectionist, no doubt -
In a Burke and Hare, not
Christ, way.

How my tears will fall
As my knife slits, my saw
Grates, my hands
Fill with blood.

NORMAN MACCAIG

New Masters

You were dreaming of the past
And your victory over the German.
But evil comes from within,
And the face of evil varies.
It is not the same as it was last time.