that arrests the reviewer's glib gallop and demands serious judgment. Some critics, I see, have likened Stanley Middleton to Forster. Myself, I found his tone and his aim very much closer to the Lawrence of *Sons and Lovers*.

In other company, Lorenza Mazzetti's *The Sky Falls* would be the outstanding achievement. Set in the later years of World War II in Tuscany, it's the story of Penny and her smaller sister Baby, orphans living with their Jewish Uncle Wilhelm, a true father-figure this time, in a large villa where the Bishop visits and German generals come to play chess. At the end, retreating Nazis destroy the place and murder the adults, perhaps formally collaborators but more than passively resistant. Uncle Wilhelm shoots himself. Penny and her sister, weeping at their uncle's grave, see what they think is Don Quixote – a British soldier.

It seems ungracious for an Englishman to criticize so apparently Anglophile and so touching a story. Through the eyes of Penny, the book sparklingly recaptures an upside-down world, in which the innocents love Mussolini, heroes are labelled 'wicked', and the Church plays a kindly but sadly equivocal role. As in her British short film, *Together*, Miss Mazzetti coolly and sympathetically takes up the case for the helpless, the weak, the victimized, the deluded: she must be a thoroughly likable person. And yet I can't help being a little suspicious of such impeccable ventriloquism, so easy a use of the 'out-of-the-mouths-of-babes-and-sucklings' device. Although Penny herself emerges as a charmingly naughty little girl, the structure of the moral universe presented through her seems to be based on a slightly false, slightly over-simplified and sentimental view of childhood – not unlike that deployed by Katherine Mansfield.

Nevertheless, *The Sky Falls* stands up very well beside *The Lonely Girl*, in which Edna O'Brien employs a similar innocent's-eye technique to recount events rather nastier than her narrator realizes. While Miss Mazzetti at least lets the events speak for themselves, and consistently sustains the narrator's persona, Miss O'Brien has a tendency to wink at the reader, and to make her central character lurch from naivety to comparative sophistication. Caithleen is a young Irish girl from the country who gets involved with a film man living on an estate some way outside Dublin: a worldly and cosmopolitan figure (he reads the NEW STATESMAN), but not – as the blurb would have us believe – an Austrian. Sure and begob, it's touching enough, and told with a rare fluency; an easy read, and Kingsley Amis is keen on it, and all. In places, it's quite funny – not that I go much for drunken Catholic peasants and viragos with shotguns. But I was worried both by this fake-innocence kick and, à propos of it, by the narrator's equivocal relation to the author. Caithleen, it emerges, used to talk to trees: so, according to the dust-jacket, did the author, who's also said to be 'superstitious about cats and fur coats'. And a mink-lined miaow to you, too.

H. E. Bates is too canny to let fall such scalp-prickling details: there's an elusiveness about his literary personality that suggests a sensitive man in the pay of a shrewd one. Ever since his Larkin-family fantasies it's been a little hard to know how to take him One of the five stories in *The Golden Oriole* echoes the Larkin atmosphere: it portrays a skiving, plausible rogue of a lorry-driver, living off the near-country by means of theft and lies. The portrait, counterpointed with the flimsy stereotype of a 'philosophy student', would be more impressive if its subject's sketchy ethics didn't enjoy the apparent approval of the author – 'life' as against theory, he seems to proclaim. If mine seems a stuffy reaction to a frivolous anecdote, let me add that in all but one of the other, more 'sensitive' stories the values seem equally *simpliste*: in most cases, again, it's 'life' against timidity or convention or false gentility. Ah, you may say, but what about Lawrence? Well, to be quite honest, most of these stories seem to suffer precisely from sex-in-the-head. The one exception is the first, a fairly conventional but interesting tale of a son learning sad truths about his father and mother and trying not to repeat their mistakes with his own, once his father's, love. It's a little wispy, very much in the pre-war H. E. Bates manner; but I prefer it to false bounce.

Coat Upon a Stick is a first novel by a young American that's worlds away from these others. A bleak, serious book, it describes a day in the life of an old immigrant Jew in New York: thereby it takes in his family, his whole hermetic milieu. If he's unpleasant, it's chiefly because life has been hard; and by not burking either unpleasantness, Norman Fruchter awakens what it's cant but convenient to call compassion. The whole book, in fact, might be a commentary on Arthur Koestler's 1954 essay, 'Judah at the Crossroads'. That concluded, if you remember, as follows: 'The mission of the Wandering Jew is completed; he must discard the knapsack and cease to be an accomplice in his own destruction.' *Coat Upon a Stick* suggests that this is happening: but it also explains, convincingly, why an older generation finds it so hard.

RICHARD MAYNE