hoovering near the grave. He is beyond most verbal explanation except to deny there is no escape from the totalitarian state and to claim that having endured the extremes of political conversion and physical degradation it is possible with a spiritual revolution. How he came to this state he has set down on paper for someone to read, transcribe and make public to the free world.

Sebastian's story makes up the bulk of the book. It is an intensely human document describing in fascinating and detarred detail the birth of a Communist State.

In the summer of 1941 the Iononesco brothers and Valentine were on the edge of adulthood, leading the carefree lives of middle-class Rumanians. But for Sebastian, the world was suddenly out of step, absorbed with death. He volunteered for the Army, resolved to find his own kind of heroism and to become cleaner and stronger. His destination was a Russian prison camp; he first heard Anna Pauker and admitted aloud that heroism was simply a dangerous form of lunacy.

This was the beginning of his Communist education as a Party militant, outwardly successful, but inwardly a failure because he was not, in fact, voluntarily recognizing the absurdities of the doctrine. He opted out ten years later, when first the horror, then the sham made him face up to his conscience.

But, expelled from the Party, he was condemned to an almost ineradicable solitude which eventually led to his arrest on trumped up charges of treachery. So he became part of the ritual he had witnessed so often, the mystical drama of sabotage by an enemy of the people. It was then he had his revelation that brought a kind of peace which he was able to propagate.

Paul Scott

In several ways Paul Scott is a paradox. He must surely now be counted as one of our finest writers, yet the more he progresses as a novelist the further away he grows from the average reader, particularly from his early following of such excellent books as The Alien Sky and The Mark of the Warrior. Again, the more complex and obscure his themes become the more simply and lucidly does he express himself. Never before has his writing seemed so visual as in this new book, that combines the techniques of Spain and leaves one with an aching sense of how truly frail is man's conception of love.

Paul Scott's central character is a modestly successful novelist, Edward Thornhill, who has died in a car crash with his wife, Myra, at the age of 60. There is some doubt as to whether it was an accident. Much more important, however, are the notes and preliminary stories he left for his next novel. They seem disconnected but by Thornhill's own background emerges, so does their interdependence on each other. Each episode, each character is an extension of Thornhill himself. There is, for instance, the young Thornhill in India, a gauche youth ripe for his first love affair with a bitter creature whose upper-class parents have driven her into being half-boy, half-girl.

Always Thornhill is haunted by the belief that marriage can only result in a physical betrayal. Take the case of Myra, 20 years younger, sitting on the beach, day after day with a young man while Thornhill crouches in his room, his binoculars trained on them, waiting for them to touch each other, almost willing it to happen. In his notes they become the Crackhocks, fleeing from social disgrace. But Thornhill's real moment of truth—when his soul is laid bare—is at the bullfight (a magnificent description this, mystical more than physical) when he tries to translate the weight of his own problems into the ritual of the corrida. There are always at least three fights going on at any one time—... the flight the bull puts up, the flight the torero tries to conduct, and the flight the spectators think they see.

Except to say that one is continually reminded of Maugham, it is difficult to capture the full flavour of this book. It needs to be read a second, even a third time. I just wonder where Paul Scott goes from here.

H. E. Bates

The summer of 1940, the beginning of the Battle of Britain, what better time than now, just 24 years later, to evoke the memory of those poignant, yet universal days? Perhaps it is unreasonable to expect this to be one of the great war novels, yet the niggles remain that it could have been.

Bates, however, has chosen to soften the scene, setting it in a corner of his beloved Kent countryside, and showing it through the eyes of a young girl, Elizabeth, who in her own way grows up alongside the young pilots from the nearby airfield. At first her home is requisitioned, but still war seems a long way away, a dashing romantic affair, peopled by gay young men with a new language. And there is still butter and eggs from the farm. Life is not so different.

Then as the shadow draws nearer, the pace hots up and the men drop out, one by one. War in the orchards, thick with fruit, is now a reality, that can send a German plane spinning to disaster, emptying its pilot into a quiet field, blooded and blackened, to move in the last agonising death throes circled by his enemies. Awakening at last from her torpor, Elizabeth plunges into war and into a brief immature marriage snatched between endless sorties that leave her husband beyond ordinary exhaustion.

Within its limitations this indeed is a moving novel that has captured the spirit and the knife-edge moods of the time, but it rarely soars above the level of a beautifully written magazine story.

Catherine Gavin

An immensely readable novel about the little-known Baltic campaign of 1855 when the Russian army launched an attack against the Russian Fleet. This had been brought about by the Czar's refusal to obey the British ultimatum that Russia should withdraw all her troops from the Danubian Principalities. More than the restrained but graphic descriptions of war is the skill with which the author conveys the uneasy relationship between Finns and their Russian masters.

Linking the pattern of events is the love story of a young American ship's captain, deprived of his command, Brand Endicott, and a Finnish aristocrat, whose desire to see a free Finland makes her put a condition on love. Brand must first fight with the British Navy against Russia. The scene moves from high life in St Petersburg to peasant life in Finland, from naval battles to a prison hulk, all with equal ease and an excellent sense of history.

Audrey Erskine Lindop
Nicola. Collins, 21s.

Some years ago Miss Lindop wrote a book called The Tall Headlines which was an exploration of the reactions of a family with a murderer in its midst. Haring the same theme but the same author's style and skill was not surprising since she has returned to a similar theme.

This time Nicola, the 25-year-old narrator, returns to the village of her birth to face the gossip after seeing three years in prison for being accessory to a brutal Suhu murder. She had protected the killer, her lover, hiding him in the village church. Nicola genuinely wants to help her family and the village. She wants to help the village. Loudest in condemnation is the English bank manager, Ted Morey, who had lasted after her for years till she gave in to him. His mother takes the girl into battle and Ted's attitude begins to change. By the end the author puts forward a theory that no one's public humiliation is the same as his private face. And that the private person is generally better. Because she writes so convincingly in belief in the characters never worried. I was left with a lurking suspicion I had been reading a poor man's Dostoevsky.

Yvonne Mitchell

An intelligent, yet oddly told, novel about Rachel, the new almost complete of the English boarding school. At 14 she is illegitimate, and inhabiting a dream world woven from her own adolescent loneliness by her widowed stepmother, on a homosexual uncle in London with his young bride. At first, not understanding her life, she is grateful for her new upbringing. Olivier her only real companion, at her first private concert, a chain of circumstances part of a deal that rumbles under York stage. During this...