

Dreary, static work—partly because Bradley has kept his gift for comedy under wraps, partly because (unlike for example, Jason Miller in *That Championship Season*) he has not found a way of keying the past into the present, and partly because Harold, though overripe for an epiphany, never has one.

◆ Braverman, Kate
 SQUANDERING THE
 BLUE: *Stories*
 Ballantine \$17.95
 10/? SBN: 449-90551-9

Twelve stories of hallucinatory intensity by the author of the novels *Lithium for Medea* (1979) and *Palm Latitudes* (1988).

Is there anything left to say about alcoholism and addiction? In a bravura performance, Braverman writes of women who drink, drug, and finally turn to A.A.—and she makes their stories grippingly fresh and insistent. Language itself, which tempts and mocks her characters, also becomes the one permitted intoxication. A vein, visible again after collapsing from years of drug abuse, says, "I am Lazarus. Kiss me with metal." Skies are "etched with the blue of radium or narcotics. . . luminescent with ancient fever." One story bleeds into the next as Braverman repeatedly circles over the same ground: women who write poetry and turn 40, who have young daughters or wish they did. They live in chicken-wire shacks in Hawaii and homes in Beverly Hills amid a lush sensuality of color ("The leaves looked like moist tropical stars. . . a sexual green, assaulting the boundaries"); they love terrifying addicted men; they die of breast cancer. Images are gorgeous and deadly: some reappear in story after story (vodka labels "enticing as a postcard from Kauai. Or a medieval script, an illumination imposed upon the pagan"); this risky repetition succeeds in heightening the sense of myth and inexorable obsession. Braverman falters only toward the end: the last four stories expand the scope of the collection, but the suffering and stylistic exuberance begin to seem forced.

Incantatory prose, penetrating observation of addiction and modern malaise: frightening and unforgettable.

Butler, Jimmie H.
 THE ISKRA
 INCIDENT
 Dutton \$18.95
 9/28 SBN: 525-24898-6

A debut novel in which post-*glasnost* relationships revert to mid-century mistrust—thanks to a jetliner full of Soviet bigwigs that plunges into the Pacific on its approach to San Francisco.

There's something fishy about the crash of the Ilyushin from the start. Why was it 70 miles off course when it finally showed up on American radar after its flight from Vladivostok? Why didn't the pilot stop talking to the air controllers? Why didn't he respond to the Air Force fighters sent up to check him out? Did the missile that was accidentally fired by the American fighter actually hit the Soviets—or did the Russian take a dive? And why did the jetliner seem to be looking for a specific spot in the ocean before diving in? Was it coincidence that the crash was so close to a Soviet naval task force? Within minutes of the disaster, U.S.A.F. Col. Jack Phillips, Russian speaker and scholar, gets the order to sort things out. Greatly complicating Phillips' task is the involvement of a couple of network newsmen—presidential pal and Cold War hard-liner Alexander Braxton and his beautiful protégée Christine Merrill. On account of Braxton's powerful connections, he and Christine get to shadow all of Phillips' movements. And all those movements seem to be known in advance by somebody who doesn't want the mystery cleared up. Everything points to the involvement of the Stalinist Soviet defense minister—who was supposed to have been on the plane when it went in the drink. . .

A moderately ingenious plot is stretched a bit too far.