

Violent echoes

Norman Shrapnel reviews new fiction

Vail, by Trevor Hoyle (John Calder, £4.95).

As if the present were not enough, Trevor Hoyle brings us a plausible peep into a future which is all too recognisably like it, only worse. Vail presents a Britain where basic manufacturing is extinct but pornography, video shops, money marketing, restaurants and prostitution flourish, showbiz personalities float around in a haze of wealth and popular worship, while headlines scream about more attempts on the prime minister's life.

Mediapersons speak to mediapersons in a near-impenetrable code which Vail, the hero, manages to break. He inevitably becomes a megastar himself, which makes a change from living in a detached cardboard box under a viaduct.

Hoyle has a sharp ear for the shifty idioms of menace and has mastered the knack of being both horrifying and funny. But essentially in that order. There's a genuine sense of the malign that puts me in mind of Wyndham Lewis.