

19/4 Scotland on Sunday

Short & Sharp

WYOMING TRAIL

by Cheryl Moskowitz *Granta*, £9.99

The spectre of Francine's father, Leon, hovers over her life. A violent childhood presence, then an unknowable absence, he creates a cavernous vacuum over which Francine obsesses. She feels connected to him in ways her sisters do not; it's a tie she cannot unbind. Avoiding mawkishness, Moskowitz portrays Francine as headstrong and grieving, courageous and afraid. Her ugly childhood is reported without sentimentality; her pubescent anorexia occurs almost in passing; her search for her father is at arm's length. Emotional distance is an effective tool. When Francine finally faces up to her father, it is deeply moving.

BENEATH MULHOLLAND: THOUGHTS ON HOLLYWOOD AND ITS GHOSTS

by David Thomson *Little, Brown*, £20

Writing of a Joan Didion novel, Thomson, film critic, novelist and deep-thinker, describes his own work: "It lives in the gaps that film is compelled to splice together." Thus his essays suggest post-movie lives for characters such as Tony Manero (*Saturday Night Fever*) and Elliott (*ET*) or they speculate about James Dean's career had he lived or they give insider details of unnamed movie stars' secret debaucheries. Occasionally Thomson's ego obtrudes; he is inclined to conspicuous self-indulgence. But at his best, he's stimulating and inspiring, an original who imputes more to movies than they probably deserve.

THE KINGDOM OF SHIVAS IRONS

by Michael Murphy *Mainstream*, £14.99

"Experiences at the edge of the strangeness curve" are Murphy's preoccupation. His sequel to *Golf in the Kingdom* describes his search for the mystical, mythical Scottish golfer Shivas Irons. Irons pops up hither and thither, whispering wisdom and inspiring golfers towards visionary strokes. Golf becomes a peculiar out-of-body trip for acid-heads, infused with neo-sexual climaxes and spiritual nirvanas. Golf and the paranormal make an unlikely pairing; Murphy gives his Zen-like novel plenty of bunker reality, but dodgy Scottish accents and a sense of drug-induced befuddlement prevail.

KRISTINA WOOLNOUGH