READING BETWEEN THE LINES. By Ferdinand Valentine, O.P. (Blackfriars Publications, 6s.)

Omne trinum est perfectum say the philosophers. Father Ferdinand Valentine is a philosopher and knows this truth. His three 'Theophila' books form a perfect little thing. This, the third, is almost purely a scriptural commentary of a simple devotional and helpful kind on the literal and spiritual meaning of the main scenes of our Blessed Lord's life as described by St John. The book will be found useful either for spiritual reading or for meditation, or for both, the former providing matter for the latter. In the end of this book the author says 'Goodbye Theophila'. Whether this is a final goodbye to Theophila or not, we hope that Father Valentine will produce more books, especially on the delightful lines of a scriptural commentary like *Reading Between the Lines.* GILES BLACK, O.P.

ESSAYS ON LITERARY CRITICISM AND THE ENGLISH TRADITION. By S. L. Bethell (Dennis Dobson; 6s.)

Although Mr Bethell tells us in his prefatory note to the essays—eight in number—that comprise this slim volume that he had undertaken a certain amount of revision for book publication after they had first appeared in the *New English Weekly*, in essence they still remain magazine articles, and must be judged as such rather than as any sort of comprehensive treatise on the subject of criticism. The virtue of the book lies, indeed, chiefly in Mr Bethell's ability to throw out, as it were, a series of interesting ideas which the reader can reject or follow up at will. Of some of these ideas one would really like to hear more.

His training as a critic—if one may call it that—has been to a great extent, one gathers, in the school of Dr Leavis and his disciples—he tells us that he has not missed a single number of *Scrutiny* since its inception—but in his present position he is by no means entirely in sympathy with the beliefs and methods of that school. The longest of the essays in this book, 'Two Streams from Helicon,' deals, with clarity and succinctness, with what he calls the two traditions of English poetry, as reflected in the work of the 'Group A' poets, Shakespeare and Donne, on the one hand, and of the 'Group B' poets, the Spenser-Milton-Tennyson group, on the other. Here Mr Bethell rejects, and rightly too, the verdict of the Leavis school that only the first group truly represents the English tradition in poetry: despite the scrupulous carefulness of Dr Leavis himself, there is no doubt that, as Mr Bethell says, 'in some of Dr Leavis's disciples the discipline of criticism seems to have degenerated into an external technique'. This is indeed fatal.

Probably the most important problem which the book raises is that of 'Christian criticism'. Mr Bethell maintains that there can be no such person as the open-minded critic: the critic's function is to attempt to estimate the quality of the writer's insight, and he can only do that by measuring it according to his own insight. If he is a Christian, then his standard of measurement will be based on Christian principles, just as if he is a Marxist it will be based on Marxist principles. Christian criticism must of necessity be bound up with theology, for religion is the whole of life and the object of literature is the interpretation of life. This is all right as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. It is essential to distinguish between theology in its widest—and yet its literal—meaning as the science of the knowledge

of God and therefore of man, and in its narrower doctrinal sense. There is, for instance, far too much Catholic criticism which adopts the attitude that if a writer is a Catholic he must therefore be good, and if he is anti-Catholic he must therefore be bad. While the Catholic critic's judgements must all be conditioned by the nature of his beliefs, because they give him a positive standard by which to judge, good literature is not necessarily sound doctrine, and the critic who allows himself to be led astray in this way only abuses his function. Although one feels sure that Mr Bethell would agree with this, he does not perhaps make it clear enough in his book.

Criticism today is becoming ever more and more lacking in honesty and positive and valid standards. A book such as Mr Bethell's could do much to remedy some of the defects of the time, and one can only be sorry that there is not more of it—and in greater detail. ELIZABETH KING

SHAKESPEARE'S USE OF THE ARTS OF LANGUAGE. By Sister Miriam Joseph, C.S.C. (Columbia University Press. London: Geoffrey Cumberlege; 21s.)

Shakespearean criticism has become of recent years, as the author of this book suggests, more and more diverse in its approach to its subject: indeed there are few angles—historical, political, social, religious, scientific and so on—from which by now Shakespeare's peculiar genius has not been viewed. As a new type of study, then, this book is a perfectly justifiable and laudable attempt to present the complete theory of composition current during the Renaissance with particular reference to the way in which Shakespeare's individual talent utilized the accepted and traditional stylistic forms. The immense care and clarity with which Sister Joseph has tabulated the two hundred figures of speech distinguished by rhetoricians of the time, and her knowledge of the plays and their constructions, can never be called in question, but yet at the end of it all one is tempted to regard the whole book as an exercise in excessive ingenuity. There are undoubtedly some people who derive great satisfaction from this sort of detailed analysis, from being able to identify forms and classify them, but for the most part a book such as this is probably of real value only to the philologist—the man who is professionally interested in language *qua* language and who might use Shakespeare as a kind of yardstick to measure the tendencies of the time.

For the general reader it is difficult to see just how the book could contribute much to either an appreciation of Shakespeare or to an understanding of his plays —except in so far as it may make one realize more forceably what one must surely have realized already, that 'he uses every resource of language and imagination to give life, movement and piquancy to his richly laden thought'. But perhaps the fault in this case lies in the English mind which is as fundamentally vague and imaginative as the American is precise and analytical. ELIZABETH KING