

veyed; their houses and rooms are inspected with clinical accuracy. *The Great Enchantments* is a fair copy of an important part of the novelist's work. It lacks emotive compulsion, but its achievement is in another order—less ambitious but no less fascinating to discern.

I.E.

HOLES IN THE SKY. By Louis MacNeice. (Faber & Faber; 7s. 6d.)

With the publication of his new book of poems Mr MacNeice's publishers make the suggestion that some people may have felt that in the writing of radio plays he had 'given up to the B.B.C. what was meant for mankind'. If people do indeed have such a feeling, in a sense, they are justified in it, for it is doubtful whether he has written anything in recent years comparable with some of his felicitous earlier work such as 'The Sunlight on the Garden', but even so there seems little reason to complain: the development of his particular technique as a poet is perhaps best suited to broadcast drama. It may be due to a certain straightforwardness of pictorial imagery—'when barrows of daffodils butter the pavement'—or to an ability, as in 'Weekend' in the present volume, to sustain a metaphor without any sense of strain. At any rate, one has no cause to imagine that he has been misusing his gifts.

One is tempted to wonder how far his 'Elegy for Minor Poets' is intended to apply to himself, for it is, in many ways, curiously relevant to his own position. Mr MacNeice has not the stature of a great poet: of him, too, it might well be said that he 'knew all the words but failed to achieve the Word', because although in his poetry he has facility, slickness and neatness of phrase, he lacks that something additional which would transform his oft-recurring 'Tom, Dick and Harry' into figures of more than passing importance. There is much in his work which reminds one of the lyrics of a clever night-club song-writer, and it is not surprising to learn that some of it has indeed been set to music in this manner. He is probably at his best in his short poems, which are strained taut as a bowstring to shoot their arrows to the dead centre of the target. The epigraph poem

What is truth? says Pilate,
 Waits for no answer;
 Double your stakes, says the clock
 To the ageing dancer;
 Double the guard, says Authority,
 Treble the bars;
 Holes in the sky, says the child
 Scanning the stars.

is such a one, and 'Corner Seat' another.

In the one really long poem in the book, 'The Stygian Banks', one cannot help feeling that he is a little out of his depth: doubtless he is groping after something much profounder and more positive

than he has so far arrived at, but he has not achieved that synthesis of heart and brain which would here make him a greater, and a truer, poet.

ELIZABETH KING.

THE SPIDER IN THE ROSE. By Robert H. Hill. (Hilda Devereux; 8s. 6d.)

This is an historical novel dealing with the Walpole plot against the life of Queen Elizabeth. It possesses also some of the superficial characteristics of the detective but the puzzle is too easy to make that line worth tracing. There is also an amount of character drawing, most of it unconvincing; Stanley, the born courtier, is too brittle for flesh and blood and there is too much cloak and dagger about the base plotters. Philip Gamon, the adventurous rustic from Devon, is the central character. Contact with the world develops his mind only fitfully and he shows sad lapses into bucolic simplicity. He remains a bookish type to the end: he shows no signs of susceptibility to the tender passion; all his thoughts are set on saving Gloriana—when he's not reading a sonnet by Shakespeare (though 'he did not even recognise it as a sonnet'). Therefore when he returns to Barnstaple hand in hand with the devoted Anne and we hear the wedding bells ringing across the moors we can only presume that it was leap year.

Francis Bacon's is the portrait you would expect; it has merely been taken out of the gallery, not repainted. He is obviously inspired by his own dictum 'to dwell among things soberly . . . to look into and dissect the nature of this real world'. Here as elsewhere in the book there is too much dissection and not enough sober dwelling. While Gamon is brooding by the banks of Thames—not on love but on the wickedness of plotters, though he's never quite sure about the Jesuits—Bacon is trying to live up to what the professors of Elizabethan Life and Thought have made of him. It makes him painfully self-conscious.

GERARD MEATH, O.P.

THE WINTER'S TALE. A Study by S. L. Bethell. (Staples; 10s. 6d.)

A book on 'The Winter's Tale' is immediately welcome because it turns attention to an important and neglected Shakespearean play, and Mr Bethell's spirited defence of his critical principles is timely. 'The critic who is self-consciously aware of holding a particular view of life is much less prone to fall into error than he who believes himself "impartial", "scientific", a "pure scholar".' That is excellent. Besides principle there is scholarship which forms the foundation for Part I, and in Part II close and accurate interpretation of the text. After a graceful tribute to Dr Tillyard we know what sort of interpretation to expect; the principle of multi-consciousness and the analogical view are not easy to apply, but Mr Bethell writes clearly and