

to associate the movement for a radical renewal of society with theology, as Mr. Matthiessen does, is to be guilty of an arbitrary construction. For if examined empirically, from the standpoint of concrete historical experience rather than through lax literary concepts, socialism and theology turn out to be mortal enemies. Mr. Matthiessen cannot have it both ways.

PHILIP RAHV

Mr. Auden's Tennyson

A SELECTION FROM THE POEMS OF ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON. Selected and with an introduction by *W. H. Auden*. Doubleday, Doran. \$3.00

THE spectacle of Mr. Auden, the bad boy of the 'thirties, sitting down to edit Tennyson is a puzzling one, even allowing for the obvious elements of an explanation, such as his recent concern with religion, Mr. Eliot's qualified approval of "In Memoriam," and Tennyson's interest as a technician. It is not as if Tennyson particularly needed selecting or editing, for the DeVane edition, with its full and admirably balanced selection, its informative notes and accurate text, and its skillfully chosen bibliography, is available for less than half the price of Mr. Auden's. In any event, Mr. Auden has contributed nothing as an editor. He has provided neither notes nor bibliography. There is not even an index, though he has arranged his selections by types and ordered the poems within these categories according to a scheme of his own which is not very clear to me but which brings, for instance, the "Demeter and Persophone" (1887), with its confident and measured brilliance, between "The Lotus-Eaters" and "Ulysses" (in the 1842 versions), with their overcharged, occasionally almost hypnotic, atmosphere and their profound ambiguity of intention. His text is the Rolfe text of 1898 (The Student's Cambridge Edition) with its spate of exclamation points, its American spelling, and its stern suppression of the laureate's amiable weakness for the colon. Why Mr. Auden should have gone to the trouble of printing the fine Tennysonian picture opposite page 120 and ignored the far more pervasive influence for this purpose of the text it would be hard to say, especially since a reasonably Tennysonian text is easily available in Hallam's edition of 1908.

There remain, then, as explanations of this edition, the selection and

the neatly phrased introduction. Except when it is, as Mr. Edmund Wilson remarked, "slightly screwy," neither of these has anything out of the ordinary to offer. The selection points up the *Letters from Iceland* Tennyson, such as it is—there is hardly more than "Will Waterproof" that is really first-class in this kind, though Mr. Auden has also rescued "The Spiteful Letter" and from among the discarded poems, "The New Timon"; the occasionally effective dramatic monologues such as "St. Simeon Stylites" and the two "Northern Farmers" go unrepresented. Mr. Auden also gives some emphasis to the completely charming, essentially innocent old man of the later epistles, and dedications with "To E. Fitzgerald" and "The Roses on the Terrace"; and it is good to see the wonderful dedication to Mrs. Tennyson of *The Death of Oenone* reprinted. But for some reason, though "The Progress of Spring" is here, the fine lines "To Mary Boyle" which introduce it are not; nor are the lines to Jowett. The dedication of *Demeter* to the Marquis of Dufferin is apparently omitted because Mr. Auden could not suppress a ludicrous and irrelevant association when he read stanza ix. This is an unfortunate loss, for Tennyson's late developed and somewhat neglected ability to be simple and direct and at the same time serious and even eloquent was never better demonstrated than in this poem about his dead son. The limiting social sentiments of the Victorian mind, its feelings about the Empire and its feelings about the family, are both present here, without the bluster or smugness that often accompanied them.

Perhaps it is Mr. Auden's exaggerated disapproval of the mid-Victorian Tennyson which is at work here. This dislike apparently has led him to omit not only all the "Idylls" and most of the argumentative poems but such things as "St. Agnes' Eve" and "Sir Galahad." The equally mid-Victorian "Despair" is, however, resuscitated in order, presumably, to lay even greater stress on what Mr. Auden seems to have decided is Tennyson's real subject:

Black Tennyson, whose talents were
For an articulate despair,

as the "New Year Letter" says, and the present introduction:

he had the finest ear, perhaps, of any English poet; he was also undoubtedly the stupidest, there was little about melancholia that he didn't know; there was little else that he did.

Even for the sake of a nicely balanced sentence it is of course silly to call Tennyson "stupid." He shared, as Mr. G. M. Young has pointed out,

the mid-Victorian mind's "unwillingness to quit, and its incapacity to follow, any chain of reasoning which seems likely to result in an unpleasant conclusion"; but if you read the tributes to Tennyson's "thought" in the *Memoir* and Bradley's *Commentary on In Memoriam* I think you will find it hard to believe that Tennyson was any stupider—if this be stupidity—than most of the best of his contemporaries. In any event, it is in the context of the Victorian, and to a considerable extent of the mid-Victorian, frame of mind that Tennyson's melancholy and mysticism realize themselves. Without it, without the simplicity of "Dora," the Christmas-card scenery and mysticism of "Sir Galahad," and the morality and melancholy of the best of the idylls (Mr. Auden is properly annoyed by "Guenevere," but "Guenevere" is not the only idyll)—without these you have an historically impossible Tennyson whose "subtle and luxurious and sombre" moods, deeply involved as they are with the whole body of Victorian ideas and feelings, lose their solidity. It was the Apostles and Hallam and Somersby and Emily that gave body to "In Memoriam" lxxxix and xcv and the rest.

The whole drift of Mr. Auden's introduction and selection seems, in this respect, curious. However badly he did it—and certainly he did not do it very well—Tennyson was the last English poet who tried to confront the central problems and anxieties of his time as his times saw them and not merely in personal terms. His rigorous suppression of such early poems as "The Mystic" is clear external evidence of this effort. He was, it is true, in some ways a very naive man; it is breath-taking to think of Henry James at Aldworth, as he describes himself in *The Middle Years*, listening while Tennyson innocently lectured a luncheon table of Victorian ladies on the Marquis de Sade. But without this naiveté in another guise such poems as "The Roses on the Terrace" and "Helen's Tower" would have been impossible. It is probably true, too, that Tennyson's greatest source of strength was his personal maladjustment, and it is not easy to see him suppressing it, as Mr. Auden so acutely points out he did in "Ulysses." But it is one thing to disregard the social difficulties (the attacks on the pathetically ill-concealed "morbidly" of "Maud" were vicious) and say that Tennyson would have done better to confront his times with his whole self; it is another to suggest that he ought to have kept his deepest source of understanding pure by not trying to bring it to terms with the intellectual, emotional, and physical world in which his contemporaries lived. Perhaps he gave up more than he needed to, though it is hard to judge today;

he certainly accepted a good deal that makes us uncomfortable. But the Tennyson who gruffly challenged Henry Van Dyke, the first time that great admirer turned up at his study door, with "Are you a journalist?" and received the wholly satisfactory reply "No, my lord, I am a gentleman," is the Tennyson who wrote the "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington"; and it is not easy to see how he could have been the one without being the other.

That Mr. Auden should not have noticed what is so obvious seems curious because he himself has faced a similar problem, with resources not so unlike Tennyson's and in a world where the chances of being trivial, though not of being naive, are quite as great. He too has been trying to talk about familiar subjects in something like a conventional way, as for instance in the Yeats and Freud elegies; there has even emerged from the background of his poetry a kind of domestic imagery of wash basins and Christmas decorations and the seasons and scenery "on this island." Perhaps this development has been partly unconscious, as it must almost wholly have been with Tennyson; but with so clever a man as Mr. Auden it must have been partly also a deliberate willingness to accept losses in the hope of achieving something which is necessary for great poetry. If it has been, then he ought to have sympathized a little with Tennyson's effort to do the same kind of thing, even though that effort may sometimes have been ill-advised, as Mr. Randall Jarrell thinks Mr. Auden's has, and even though Tennyson sacrificed something of what he had for certain minor compensations but without ever achieving what he wanted, as it may yet turn out Mr. Auden has.

ARTHUR MIZENER

Old Masters for Tomorrow

ABSTRACT AND SURREALIST ART IN AMERICA. By *Sidney Janis*.
Reynal and Hitchcock. \$6.50

IT IS told that "Alice in Wonderland" having found favor with Queen Victoria, Her Majesty graciously allowed Lewis Carroll to dedicate his next work to her. This happened to be *The Fifth Book of Euclid Treated Algebraically, So Far As It Relates to Commensurable Magnitudes*. Some similar mischievousness rules the sequence of publication of the two books