

tions. Since moments of ecstasy are unlikely in politics, the reader is, happily, spared a political commentary.

One closes this book no longer embarrassed but filled with admiration for the daring of a man who is not afraid to reveal his love for beauty and the enchanted moments it gives him. His own rich prose is supplemented by many remarkably beautiful photographs by D. A. Harrisiadis of Athens.

KIERAN MULVEY, O.P.

THE GREAT TRADITION. By F. R. Leavis. (Chatto and Windus; 12s. 6d.)

Every reader of Dr Leavis's new book will do well to ponder the quotation from D. H. Lawrence's letters with which it begins. 'I always feel as if I stood naked for the fire of Almighty God to go through me . . . One has to be so terribly religious to be an artist.' It should be laid beside George Eliot's account of herself to Cross (although Dr Leavis has not quoted it): 'She told me that in all that she considered her best writing there was a "not-herself" which took possession of her . . . and she believed was responsible for the good effect'. This is the first distinctive quality of the English novel, a 'marked moral intensity' which is by no means the same thing as aesthetic intensity. The great English novelists are certainly concerned with form and style but not as ends in themselves; they are utterly antipathetic to Walter Pater. That is Dr Leavis's contention, and thus he pricks the bubble of fame that surrounds the eighteenth century novel and all that 'enlightenment or aestheticism or sophistication that feels an amused superiority' to standards of right and wrong and simple human values. That can only lead to triviality and evil and is a very different thing from the 'reverent openness before life' which marks Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad. Here again distinctions are necessary: life is not the same thing as promiscuous living. George Eliot is supposed to have suffered crippling limitations as an artist because of the provincial boundaries of her life (all art belongs to Bloomsbury). Dr Leavis will not have this. The depth and reality of the artistic conception spring not from the size of the experience but from the 'reverent openness' with which the artist faces it, and this implies 'moral interest in human nature'. So Dr Leavis finds moral intensity in Jane Austen (whom he does not deal with in this book), George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad in an outstanding fashion because they are passionately concerned about the meaning and purpose of human life and use their considerable technical talents to explore this question. There lies Dr Leavis's pre-eminence as a critic: he does believe in objective standards. Perhaps he is unduly harsh on the 'lower grade' novelists (though he does make his position clear enough early in the book) and perhaps something of the splenetic temper of his writing is regrettable (though again at least half of it is as salutary as it is entertaining). Nevertheless one is profoundly grateful for criticism that probes

'essential significance' and is not content with platitudes about character drawing and fullness of life. GERARD MEATH, O.P.

THE AGE OF ANXIETY. By W. H. Auden. (Faber; 8s. 6d.)

Auden's reputation as a poet was established in this country, with those of Spender, Day Lewis and MacNeice, in the early 'thirties, in those difficult years when Europe was troubled continually by war and the rumours of war. The 'twenties were over, and they had left a feeling of general disillusionment behind them: to believe seemed impossible, unless it was in some negative creed like Communism; the future was dark; doubt was the only thing about which anyone could be certain. It is to this time that many people look for the best of Auden's verse; they complain that since his departure to America and his 'conversion' a moral earnestness has pervaded his poetry which has deprived it of its early lyrical impulse. This is something that any poet who advances spiritually must expect to hear said: the deeper his contact with things greater than and outside himself, the more difficult will be their expression. And although he may have written better poems, he is here consistently at his most interesting.

*The Age of Anxiety*, which he describes as 'a Baroque Eclogue', is divided into six unequal parts and takes the form of a dialogue on All Souls' Night during the war in a bar-parlour in New York, between four people, a woman and three men, who, for one reason or another, have cause to feel acutely the anxiety of the age.

The form of the poem illustrates well Auden's versatility as a poet—the jazz-songs have all the bitter brilliance of his early ballads and the news-bulletins are clever in their brittle sharpness—but it is perhaps questionable whether the alliterative form which he uses—the form of *The Wanderer*—is justified in an age whose ears are not attuned to it. Perhaps he has used it for this very reason, to jar just sufficiently to shake the mind into an acuter awareness. At any rate, it certainly succeeds in doing this, even if at times it seems definitely out of place and imposes only a sense of strain.

Despite this, however, there can be no doubt about the extent of Auden's achievement. Nor indeed should there be about the extent of his potentiality; in *The Age of Anxiety* he gives a clear indication that it is within his capability to write something of outstanding worth in the future.

ELIZABETH KING

THE HAPPY PROFESSION. By Ellery Sedgwick. (Eyre and Spottiswoode; 15s.)

For thirty years Ellery Sedgwick was the Editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, that most urbane and influential of American reviews. His reminiscences reflect the qualities that made him so unequalled a journalist. Born into the closed world of New England privilege, educated at Harvard, thrown into the company of the famous, his story might have been intolerably smug. Instead it is gracious and