

new investigations in several areas. Although there is some overlap of subject-matter, then, these new Boethiana cannot be said to duplicate one another. In many respects they are complementary.

The great merit of this *Boethius* – and one which no collection of essays can hope to emulate – is that it gives us for the first time not only a complete Boethius, whose many-faceted labours are, for the first time in detail, convincingly shown to be the product of a single mind. We begin with an examination of Boethius in his time, the historical, political and cultural background. Here the study of the Neoplatonic schools on whose work Boethius drew, that of John the Deacon, recipient of one of the *opuscula sacra* and an original piece on the Laurentian schism are especially valuable.

The 'four ways' to higher learning come next, as Boethius would have approved. The technical explanations are especially welcome in this section on the quadrivium, and for the most part very clear; as we should expect from Professor Chadwick, the subject of music is handled with particular skill and insight. Logic is treated at length; the large proportion of Boethius' surviving output which is concerned with logic demands a substantial chapter. Again the exposition dexterously balances the needs of the reader with little knowledge of the content of Boethius' commentaries and monographs, and the requirements of those who would like to know more about Boethius' sources than has hitherto been brought together in a single study.

**EARLY AUDEN** by Edward Mendelson. *Faber and Faber*, 1981. pp xxiii + 407 £10.00

There are many now inclined to believe that Auden has been much over-rated, and that the time is right for a cool reappraisal; but even the doubter would not

The chapter on the theological tracts sets out to perform two services for Boethius: to establish beyond doubt their authenticity as his works, and to explain why Boethius was moved to write them and what they are about. Their obscurity has, except for the brief period of their popularity which reached its height about 1150, tended to displace them from their proper position in the Boethian corpus.

The final chapter on *The Consolation of Philosophy* draws upon a vast body of literature – more has been written on the *Consolation* than upon any of Boethius' other works – to take a fresh look at the central problem of providence, fate, divine fore-knowledge and free will with which Boethius was struggling as he wrote. The problem of reconciling the Christian theology of the *opuscula sacra* and the apparent paganism of the *Consolation* is confronted squarely.

This is a well-proportioned and spacious book, written with the author's characteristic wit and compressed energy of style. It succeeds remarkably well in overcoming the inherent unevenness of its subject and in making all 'Boethius' writings appear as readable and intelligible as the *Consolation of Philosophy*. It is a book of both history and ideas.

An economical system of references in the text eliminates much of the baggage of footnotes. There is a brief survey of the preservation and transmission of Boethius' works and of editions and a good index.

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seriously question Auden's importance as a poet of the 1930s, perhaps even as the poet of the 1930s: the "early Auden" must always claim our respectful atten-

tion. There can be few people, if any, better qualified to write a book with this title than Professor Mendelson, who was the poet's choice to be his literary executor, and who has already done much to justify that choice.

Following a basically chronological pattern, Mendelson takes us through the maze of intellectual and emotional migrations that bewilders so many readers of Auden's early work. The aim is to elucidate, and the aim is achieved, even perhaps triumphantly. Moving easily back and forth through the mixed up years, and making extensive use of the manuscript material to which he has access, Mendelson writes with enviable clarity and complete assurance: his gradual approach to the *In Time of War* sonnet sequence ("perhaps the greatest English poem of the decade" – if we ignore the verse commentary) is like an elegant dance. Complexity keeps clear of complication, and all is poised and controlled.

The young Auden was an irritating creature to whom public success came, not perhaps before he deserved it, but before he knew what to do with it. This volume, sparing no blemishes, traces his gauche but generally honest attempts to decide what best to do with it. Like another gauche but honest – and irritating – writer, whom he much admired for a time – D H Lawrence – Auden was a determined theoriser who despised all theories, and who never hesitated to abandon one for another once he smelt a fault. Much of Mendelson's time has to be spent accounting for the shifts and apparent contradictions. In a sense, of course, the contradictions are real for the reader, who wants, perhaps excusably, to freeze the work into artificial immobility, and to fix the "early Auden" into one mould, as he might have been for an hour or so one afternoon in

1937. But what Mendelson gives us is not a photograph, but a movie, so that from point to point in our reading of the book the Beaton photograph on the splendidly designed dust-jacket seems to change its expression: now arrogant (an expert on education at twenty-five), now embarrassed (writing *Spain* after two disillusioning months at war), now an overgrown adolescent (hero-hunting with ludicrous solemnity), now penetratingly shrewd and perceptive (revising his sonnets). There was no one "early Auden": he was the sum of his youthful but brilliant confusions. A good deal of all this is already very familiar, but if Professor Mendelson adds less than we have been expecting, his undoubted triumph is to have caught his man moving, evolving, and – manifestly – maturing. In the case of the young Auden, that is no petty triumph.

Having said that, one has nevertheless to regret the impression Mendelson gives of being the man with the answer-book: too much of his time is spent in providing solutions, and the worse the obscurity the more he seems to be licking his lips as he sets out to penetrate it. "Orpheus" – "the most gnomic and compressed of Auden's poems in the 1930s . . . the one poem that he later acknowledged to have been deliberately obscure" (p 344) – challenges Mendelson in a way he seems powerless to resist. This dotting of *i*'s and crossing of *t*'s is of course, entirely justified in a work of elucidation, but then, the book is not long enough to do the job properly. Much of the elucidation we can be grateful for as elucidation; but most of it is helpful only in the sense that it provokes further thinking by its inevitable inadequacy. Particularly in the early chapters – where we might have expected it – Mendelson is tempted to rush from poem to poem in a near-frenzy of explanations. What is more

serious is the fact that he seems to be unaware of how regularly his explicatory paraphrases empty out all the force of the *poetic statement*, and I can recall only one reference to the ordering power of "Auden's personal voice" (p 148). Again, Mendelson seems undecided about the amount as well as the kind of biographical detail he had room for, and on the whole he is more helpful when preserving an even balance between biography and dotting-and-crossing: elucidation comes in more than one form. One must regret some of the clutter, the half-answered questions, and others that are begged but not answered

at all, and the gaps which remind us that elucidation is not necessarily explanatory. It is unfair, I suppose, that we should want more than he has given us: it is a measure of his success that we do.

The book is beautifully produced in Faber's best style. Apart from one or two instances of poor type-face, I noted only one error: the inclusion (p 247) of a line from a published poem in an extract quoted from an unpublished poem. In the case of the "early Auden", one could easily spend a long time trying to make sense of it before realization dawned.

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