Reviews

Edward Mendelson. *Early Auden, Later Auden: A Critical Biography*. Princeton University Press, 2017.

xiv + 895 pages. Paperback, GBP 22.99.
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Edward Mendelson, Auden's bibliographer, literary executor (never did a poet make a better choice), editor and critic, who knows more about Auden than anyone in the world, has now published in one volume his *Early Auden* (1981) and *Later Auden* (1999), a highly informed commentary on Auden's early work and a comprehensive study of the mature poems, together with a sympathetic account of Auden's life. Although the poet's family background, education, life and loves are not scanted, this critical biography is definitely slanted towards criticism, giving a comprehensive, highly informed, intelligent account of Auden's *oeuvre*. However, whereas Rupert Davenport-Hines's biography *W. H. Auden* (1995) quoted very early poems, discussed at length the early influences of Wordsworth, Hardy and (at Oxford) T. S. Eliot, and pondered the sexual uncertainties expressed in "Thomas Epilogises," and John Fuller's *W. H. Auden: A Commentary* (1998) has a full chapter on the privately printed *Poems* (1928), Mendelson devotes only two or three pages to Auden's juvenilia. For him, the significance of the very early work is that it shows Auden getting his scaffolding in place to become "the first English writer to have absorbed all the lessons of modernism, but also understood its limits and turned elsewhere" (9).

What "turning elsewhere" means is suggested by the two photographs of Auden on the book's cover. The acclaimed young poet, smooth-haired, slightly frowning, in a tweed coat slung with a camera, stands in front of a railway carriage as if just about to board the boat train for Berlin, Spain or China. Below him, a sadder and wiser Auden with a face wrinkled "like a wedding-cake left out in the rain," as he famously said, gestures with a cigarette held in nicotine-stained fingers. Unlike his younger self, the older Auden looks not at the camera but towards another unseen person.

For Mendelson, in Auden's poetry the good wine came last (hence, presumably, his lack of interest in the juvenilia). Contesting the previous critical consensus that

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Auden's early work is his best, he argues that the poetry which so excited readers in the 1930s was immature or self-deceived or both, owing much more to the poet's personal uncertainties than its deceptively impersonal surfaces suggested, while its limited emotional and intellectual range was far surpassed in Auden's later poetry:

> Auden in his early poems treats the separation of language from the world as the ultimate subject to which all writing must refer. In his later writings he treats the gulf between language and the world … as a condition that must be accepted but that does not prevent language from being shared …. Auden moves from a world without choice to a world with choice: from a world of limits where differences are absolute and the proper literary mode is the tragedy of helplessness and isolation, to a world of possibility where differences are overcome by mutual forgiveness and responsibility and the proper literary mode is the comedy of reconciliation. Auden's early poems are for intense love affairs that end quickly; the later poems are for marriage. (31).

Throughout the book, Mendelson shows how Auden constantly reinvented and developed both his understanding of what poetry is and does, and his own role as poet.

There are five parts, two for the early Auden (fifteen chapters) and three for the later (eighteen chapters), a division reflecting both the extraordinary flowering of long poems after Auden first moved to the USA, and the high value Mendelson sets on the later Auden. Except in Part V, the theme of each division is introduced in a close reading of a poem epitomising Auden's preoccupations in its period. The post-industrial loneliness of "The Watershed" introduces "The Border and the Group" (seven chapters) on *Poems* (1930, 1933) and *The Orators* (1932), while "A Summer Night," where the poet contemplates both a shared visionary experience, (forerunner of his later conversion) and the imperilled, privileged idyll of its setting, prefaces the discussion of public poetry and love poems in "The Two Worlds," whose eight chapters describe Auden's period of greatest success in England: *Look, Stranger / On This Island* (1936), the verse plays written with Isherwood (not rated too highly), *Letters from Iceland* and the 1939 sonnets about the Sino Japanese War. The long Part III "Vision and After" (nine chapters, 199 pages) covering Auden's move to the USA, his difficult love for Chester Kallmann and his rediscovery of Christian faith, opens with the 1939 elegy on W. B. Yeats, in which Auden publicly rejected the Yeatsian role of public poet ("poetry makes nothing happen"), after which Mendelson analyses the long poems *New Year Letter / The Double Man* (1941), *For The Time Being* (1942, published with *The Sea and the Mirror* 1944), and *The Age of Anxiety* (1947)). The post-war Auden of Part IV, "The Flesh We Are" (five chapters), is introduced by an analysis of the conversational erotic "In Praise of Limestone," leading to a strong defence of "Horae Canonicae" as Auden's greatest work, followed closely by *The Shield of Achilles*. Part V, the shortest (four chapters) begins with the collection *About the House* (1964), epitomising the humane intelligence and sheer variety of Auden's late poetry.

A constant theme in the book is Auden's lifelong attempt to comprehend and synthesise the relation of Man (the young Auden mostly ignored women) with psychology, society and God. Hence the poet's penchant for encyclopaedic theorists, some distinctly oddball. Freud and Marx mattered less to the young Auden than the wacky psychologist Groddeck and anthropologist Gerald Heard, while the Christian Auden was interested not only in Kierkegaard and Karl Barth but also in the theologically minded Charles Williams whom he considered a saint (Mendelson does not disagree, despite Williams's now dubious reputation), and acknowledged intellectual debts to the theosophist Owen Barfield and the German critic-philosopher Rudolf Kassner.

How does this book differ from its two predecessors? In some ways, not much. The text has changed little, apart from a two-page discussion of Auden's 1939 journal which has recently come to light. There is no engagement with recent Auden scholarship, although eminent Auden scholars are thanked in the Acknowledgements. But there is a helpful new preface, while the truly illuminating epilogue "Auden's Secret Life," revealing Auden's private life of charitable acts, offers a new perspective on his later years. Since Mendelson writes rather little about the juvenilia, his book's importance for readers of this journal is simply that this authoritative study of the life and work of a great poet, now in one affordable volume, is required reading for anyone interested in W. H. Auden.

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Emily Brontë and Anne Brontë. *The Diary Papers of Emily and Anne Brontë*. Edited by Christine Alexander, with Mandy Swann. Juvenilia Press, 2019.

xxxix + 72 pages. Paperback, AUD 15.00.
ISBN: 9780733437151.

THE PUBLICATION of Emily and Anne Brontë's Diary Papers in this elegant scholarly edition is a feat all Brontë readers and scholars will celebrate. This is the definitive edition of the diary papers, edited by Christine Alexander, the distinguished Brontë scholar and foremost authority on the Brontës' juvenilia, in collaboration with researcher and writer Mandy Swann. For teachers of the Brontës' fiction and poetry, this visually striking, reasonably priced volume opens up a new avenue into the

Brontës' lives and work. As a university professor who teaches a large course on these writers' works each year, I will now order this edition for my students.

This is a beautiful book. On its cover is a lovely image of the desk box that holds the Brontë diary papers, with Emily's and Anne's handwriting suffusing the image, creating a palimpsest as well as surrounding it with a border. This creation and the Brontë drawing from the diary papers that comprises almost the entirety of the volume's back cover—designed by Winston Pei of Black Riders Design—evokes the margins in which Cathy Earnshaw writes her testament in *Wuthering Heights* and her caricature of Joseph, as well as Anne and Emily's creation of marginalized figures from Heathcliff to Agnes Grey. Thus, before we open this volume, Brontëans will see aesthetic connections between the diary papers and the Brontë sisters' mature work. From its poignant dedications to the memory of ABA member Ann Lock and to "eminent Brontë scholar, friend, and former Vice-President of the Brontë Society Margaret Smith," to its lovely reproductions of Brontë manuscripts and photographs and its fine appendices, this book is lovely. Alexander's previous work on Brontëan art—including the groundbreaking 1995 *The Art of the Brontës*—is evident throughout this edition.

Of course, this book is not only beautiful but immensely useful—indeed, essential to Brontëans and compelling for all readers of their novels and poetry. The erudite introduction clearly explains how the Diary Papers were created and why they are important, declaring in the very first sentence that "Emily and Anne Brontë's six Diary Papers are remarkable historical documents" (viii). The Introduction goes on to explain why these "small scraps of paper" are also precious relics, the few we have of these brilliant writers:

> Written on small scraps of paper, they record details of the everyday lives of the famous Brontë family and the hopes and fears of two young women who became famous writers. Apart from a few brief letters, the Diary Papers constitute the only surviving prose manuscripts of Emily and Anne Brontë, since not even the manuscripts of Emily's iconic *Wuthering Heights* (1847) or Anne's *Agnes Grey* (1847) and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) have survived. Furthermore, apart from their poetry and fragmentary lists of names (see Appendix B), the Diary Papers also constitute the only surviving evidence of the Gondal saga—the private creative wellspring of the two sisters. (xiii)

The Introduction reminds us that Emily and Anne wrote the Diary Papers as private communications between themselves, the recording of moments in the present—a kind of snapshot—that they would read years hence, comparing that future time of reading with the present time of writing. The editors usefully compare the Diary Papers to both time capsules and to Wordsworth's "spots of time." They trace what we learn from the Diary Papers—the close human-animal bonds in the Brontë household, for instance, evidenced by news of the family interspersed with news of Emily's bull mastiff Keeper and her hawk Nero ("Keeper is in the kitchen—

Nero in his cage"), and the realistic, unsentimental attitude toward animal lives and deaths, which "suggests that both sisters accepted the will of providence and the unremitting power of nature" (xix). We learn more about the extremely close relationship between Emily and Anne—Charlotte's close friend Ellen Nussey called them "twins"—but we also become more aware of their differences, of Emily's need for privacy and order and for Haworth itself, and of Anne's deepening commitment to the realism that emerges in her novels as she braves the world through years of experience as a governess out in a harsh world away from Haworth and her sisters.

We read the hints of Emily and Anne's private creation of the Gondal world following their youthful immersion in the Angrian fantasy realm with their older siblings Branwell and Charlotte, and, as the editors tell us, " we as readers glimpse the astonishing integration of the real and the imaginary in the lives of the young Brontës." It is wonderful to get a sense of Emily and Anne living and writing the world of two imaginary Pacific islands, Gondal and Gaaldine, while they go on with their daily lives. We have a good number of extant Angrian stories and poems by Charlotte and Branwell, and we possess so little that recalls the Gondal saga. The first evidence of this imaginary world is in Emily and Anne's November 24 Diary Paper, announced in the middle of a discussion of domestic chores: "Tabby said just now Come Anne pilloputate …. The Gondals are invading the interior of Gaaldine Sally Mosely is washing in the back—kitchin" (3-4). From this brief excerpt—as from so many others—we glimpse not only daily life at the Parsonage, but the young writers in the process of experiment—for instance, Emily trying to imitate beloved live-in servant Tabitha (Tabby) Ackroyd's Yorkshire dialect.

For readers of this lovely and distinguished book, the intimate entrée into the domestic routines and creative energies recorded in the Diary Papers will be poignant. Emily and Anne Brontë thought that they might live to be old—and we know that they died young. The November 1834 Diary Paper closes with the words: "Anne and I say I wonder what we shall be like and what we shall be and where we will be if all goes on well in the year 1874—in which year I shall be in my 57th year Anne will be going in her 55th year ... hoping we shall all be well at that time we close our paper." We know that Emily died at 30 and Anne at 29—but before they died the two sisters lived intensely and wrote brilliantly, creating masterpieces of English fiction—and for those great works of fiction and poetry we are eternally in their debt.

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Lucasta Miller. *L. E. L.: The Lost Life and Mysterious Death of the "Female Byron."* Anchor Books of Penguin Random House, 2019.

xii +401 pages. Hardback, USD 30.00; Paperback, USD 20.00.
ISBN: 9780375412783 (hbk); 978-0-593-3115-8 (pbk);
9780525655350 (ebook).

STRIKINGLY, this biography of the poetess Letitia Landon begins with her death and fully narrates that death itself some fifty pages before the book ends—just one indication that this is not your standard biography. Because evidence for events in L.E.L.'s life is so sparse, often so contradictory, and also often restricted to spotty and sometimes incorrect public records, Miller has accomplished the daunting task of writing the biography of a literary age, what Miller calls "a lost literary generation" of the 1820s and 1830s (4), between the apex of Romanticism, marked by the deaths of Keats, Shelley, and Byron, and the accomplishment of the Victorian era, by ranging widely across extant materials to assess cultural practices. She examines writings by other poets and novelists to establish the temper of the times, and she delves deeply into the paper trail left by friends and contemporaries of L.E.L. in letters, memoirs and autobiographical accounts, business documents, poetry and fiction. In doing so, she reveals a great deal about the poetesses of this period when women dominated the poetic genre and a great deal as well about the hegemonic masculinity of the literary realm, especially the economics of the periodical press.

For readers of this journal, the biography is primarily interesting for Miller's account of L.E.L.'s early career. Noted within her circle of family and friends as a strikingly precocious poet, Letitia Landon began her literary career when still a teenager, publishing her first verse in 1821 when she was nineteen. (The extensive list of her publications in the Broadview Press edition of Landon's works edited by Jerome McGann and Daniel Riess records at least four poems appearing in the *Literary Gazette* in 1820, when she would have been only eighteen.) Regularly appearing in the *Literary Gazette* from this time on, she built a remarkable reputation as L.E.L., so much so that Edward Bulwer (later Bulwer Lytton) reported that when he studied at Cambridge, her latest publication caused a weekly rush in the Union reading hall: "an impatient anxiety to hasten at once to that corner of the sheet which contained the three magical letters 'L.E.L.' All of us praised the verse, and all of us guessed at the author" (qtd. 13). After the *Gazette* revealed she was a teenaged female, Bulwer remarked, "our admiration was doubled, and our conjectures tripled" (qtd. 14). Her most frequent topic was "thwarted romantic love," unrequited passion about which she wrote knowingly (5), using sexual innuendo, allusions, resonant metaphors, and implication. As Miller judges, "Her first fans regarded her as edgy, dangerous," and to be anachronistic, "cool" (15).

Using evidence that has recently come to light, Miller establishes that Landon continued as the mistress of William Jerdan, editor of the *Literary Gazette,* for decades, secretly bearing him three children that the pair quickly gave away. While this story of illegitimate children has long percolated through the L.E.L. legend, Miller assembles the evidence painstakingly. She also convincingly establishes a campaign among male literati of the 1830s to humiliate L.E.L. by exposing her sexual history, and describes her endeavour to marry George Maclean, then British Governor of Cape Coast Castle in West Africa, to escape London gossip. Miller also makes sense of the mystique surrounding L.E.L.'s death exactly two months after she arrived there, locating her experience in West Africa amid its abolitionist controversies and brisk illegal slave trade, as well as in her husband's boorish neglect. The details support theories that L.E.L. was addicted to prussic acid, as an alternative to laudanum, and that her death was either an accidental overdose or more likely, an intentional suicide nonetheless officially ruled an accident.

This study is a triumph of scholarship. Miller has exhaustively mined available records and literature of the time to produce a lively, detailed account of a little understood literary context. She illuminates L.E.L.'s life and writings to reveal a world in which the transition to Victorian proprieties allowed for no female version of Byron to triumph, command respect, or earn financial independence. Landon's life was pathetic, perhaps most poignantly so in the fact that outside personal glimmerings in ostensibly fictive poetry, so little remains to account for her life. Miller's biography suggests that she became Jerdan's mistress in order to establish and sustain her literary career. He was her Svengali, though clearly less talented than she. But readers of this biography never get a sense of whether she actually loved the man, though this is perhaps the only reason that could account for her continuing an alliance with him after she became a best-selling celebrity and while she long worked as an unpaid editor on the *Literary Gazette.* In addition, we never learn if she had tender feelings for the man she eventually married, or whether he simply provided her an escape from the lurid gossip arising in literary London. A further mystery remains after Miller's exhaustive examination of L.E.L.'s finances. Her unremitting industry as poet, novelist, and editor should have made her wealthy, even while supporting her brother and mother. Yet she remained relatively poor, long living with friends or in rented rooms, which suggests that that Jerdan was pocketing her earnings. We close the volume wondering what *there* was there. Traces of L.E.L. the woman suggest what Miller calls "a haunting vacuum where 'Letitia Landon' ought to be" (p. xi). As a writer, her poetry bears little impress of her life except as a moving example of the culture's crushing weight of judgement against women who failed to live up to nineteenth-century ideals of domesticity. Despite her fame, L.E.L. seems never to have succeeded as a woman.

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