

the vehicles (politics, education, commerce) each has used to advance. He contests a number of liberal assumptions. Federal housing programs have not improved the living conditions of the poor. And minimum wage laws, enacted too late to "help" most European immigrants, have actually reduced the number of jobs available to blacks, Hispanics, and recent newcomers. Here, as in his *Black Education: Myth and Tragedies* (1972) and *Race and Economics* (1975), Sowell, a Hoover Institution economist, presses for rigorous scrutiny of issues that have been clouded by rhetoric, emotion, and academic taboos.

### *Arts & Letters*

**W. H. AUDEN:**  
**A Biography**  
 by Humphrey Carpenter  
 Houghton Mifflin, 1981  
 495 pp. \$15.95

"The biography of an artist, if his life as a man was sufficiently interesting, is permissible," wrote W. H. Auden (1907-73)—"provided," he added, "that the biographer and his readers realise that such an account throws no light on the artist's work." Carpenter, whose previous books include biographies of J.R.R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, takes Auden's pronouncement to heart. For what we have here is a rich and sprawling life. From his boarding school days, when he "confided his first naughty hints about the facts of sex" through his many careers (schoolmaster, film-script and travel writer, lecturer), Auden, a born teacher, felt compelled to share what he learned. Deciding at age 15 to become a poet, the precocious son of a Birmingham physician chose, perhaps, the most difficult vehicle of instruction. His adult life was peripatetic—a year in Berlin after graduating from Oxford, camping in Iceland while researching a book, traveling to Spain and China to observe two wars, in 1939 immigrating to the United States, and then finally returning to Europe (Austria and England) for his last years. All this travel was accompanied by more important intellectual and emotional departures—from the practice of amoral promiscuity toward a firm belief in marriage and monogamy; from Freud to

Kierkegaard; from Christianity to atheism and Marxism and then back to Christianity. Without judging the man or his art, Carpenter provides a broad enough sampling of the latter to show how it served as the final laboratory for Auden's manifold experiments with life.

**THE MONSTROUS RACES  
IN MEDIEVAL ART AND  
THOUGHT**

by John Block Friedman  
Harvard, 1981  
268 pp. \$20



*Duke of Rutland Collection.*

If monsters didn't exist, it would have been necessary to invent them, implies Friedman—and throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages, Europeans invented them with a creative flair. Friedman, professor of English at the University of Illinois, looks for reasons behind the lasting fascination with monstrous races. In his *Natural History*, the Roman Pliny (A.D. 23–79) compiled perhaps the most influential catalogue of “monsters.” Some, such as the Ethiopians and Pygmies, were simply natives of distant lands; others, like the Panotii (“all-ears”) and Apple-Smellers, were totally fanciful creations. The Plinian races served, in a negative way, to define *humanity*: Those who practiced alien customs or lived outside cities could not possibly be human. In Christian times, tales of monsters continued to reinforce ethnocentric norms but were further embellished by conflicting theological interpretations. One school of thought identified monsters as the descendants of Cain, and early maps of the world placed troglodytes and Sciopods (who used their huge feet as umbrellas) at the edge, “as far as possible from Jerusalem.” The *Letter of Prester John* (ca. 1163), reporting the conversion of heathens in the Far East, supported the more charitable Augustinian view that monsters possessed souls and therefore could be saved. And as early as the 12th century, a strain of “romantic primitivism” began to endow savages with noble characteristics. In most forms of medieval allegory, however, monsters served as vivid warnings to the faithful “against pride and disobedience.” New World explorations forced Europeans to give up their monsters, but the tendency to see the “outsider” as less than human persists.