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*Greece & Rome*

NEW SURVEYS IN THE CLASSICS No. 28



VIRGIL

BY  
PHILIP HARDIE

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## PREFACE

It is thirty years since the publication of the first of the *Greece & Rome* New Surveys in the Classics, Deryck Williams' elegant and humane overview of Virgil's poetry and of the state of Virgil studies at that time, reissued in 1986 with Addenda on new work between 1968–1984. By 1967 some of the main lines of modern Virgil criticism had already emerged in forms still recognizable today: the works of Klingner, Pöschl, Otis, and Putnam remain as starting-points. But since then the terrain has been very considerably reshaped by the undiminishing flood of new critical studies, particularly in the areas of poetics, allusion, narrative, and politics and ideology.<sup>1</sup> The poems of Virgil have shown themselves very fertile ground for successive waves of critical theory, as the New Critical orthodoxy of the sixties has been overtaken by narratology, post-structuralist approaches of various stripes, and New Historicism. But our picture of the texts has been altered no less by a renewed campaign of minute scholarship, attentive to the allusive detail and verbal fretwork of the poems. Our appreciation of Virgil the scholar-poet has, paradoxically perhaps, advanced *pari passu* with the appearance of a post-modernist Virgil.

My aim can be described in Deryck Williams' own words, 'to try to give in modern terms a general survey of the nature and importance of Virgil's poetry, based on a broad and selective consideration of recent important work of a critical kind'. The bibliography on Virgil is vast, and I cannot pretend to have read nearly all of it: I have attempted to provide in the notes a fairly generous selection of works that I regard as important or thought-provoking. Neither here, nor in the main text, have I consistently sought to conceal my own views as to what matters when reading Virgil, in the belief that no value-free interpretation is possible, or indeed desirable; but I have at the same time tried to give something approaching a representative account of Virgil at the end of the twentieth century.

<sup>1</sup> For a good essay on the movements in twentieth-century Virgil criticism see S. J. Harrison's 'Introduction' to Harrison (1990). The appearance of an English translation of Richard Heinze's *Virgils epische Technik*, nearly a hundred years after its first publication, has also provided the occasion to reflect on continuity and discontinuity in the practices of Virgilian criticism: see P. R. Hardie, 'Virgil's epic techniques: Heinze ninety years on', *CP* 90 (1995), 267–76.

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## PREFACE

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October 1997

Philip Hardie

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