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978-0-521-13576-4 - Quality and Pleasure in Latin Poetry

Edited by Tony Woodman and David West

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TONY WOODMAN &

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THE UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

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PROLOGUE

Horace prophesied that his fame would increase as long as the silent Vestal Virgin continued to climb the Capitol. Two millennia have passed. Silent virgins have long since disappeared from the Campidoglio. But the ancient poets are being studied today as intensely as ever. This book gathers under a single cover some specimens of what working Latinists in the 1970s produce when they tackle a poetic text some two thousand years old.

A book of this nature is inevitably diverse. The work of six different poets appears here, and several different types of poetry. There are eight different contributors, and therefore eight different approaches. (Some, for instance, have relied on translations as a critical aid, others have decided that their poetic text defies helpful translation.) Similarly the questions raised by these essays are wide-ranging and involve the relationship of contemporary Latin scholarship to modern literary criticism.

As editors we believe such variety to be a decisive advantage. There is everything to be said for showing that one cannot and should not approach every poem in the same way, and that the 'answer' to a poem cannot pop out like so many inches of computer print-out. At the same time contributors have been united in trying to make these essays as wide as possible in their appeal, useful to both students and scholars alike. Technical terms, except the most common, have been explained; and, for both comparative and protreptic purposes, contributors have freely referred to other critiques and discussions where appropriate. In the epilogue the editors have tried to sketch the actual state of literary criticism in Latin poetry as it is represented by this selection of contributors.

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Prologue

Finally there is of course a sense in which these very different essays do belong together. They are all attempting (in A. E. Housman's phrase) to say something both true and new about literature which was written during the late Republic and early Empire – a period of little more than thirty years which produced poetry of a quality which has given pleasure for twenty centuries.

A.J.W., D.A.W.