

R. M. OGILVIE

ROMAN LITERATURE
AND
SOCIETY



PENGUIN BOOKS

R. M. OGILVIE

ROMAN LITERATURE
AND
SOCIETY



PENGUIN BOOKS

PENGUIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group

27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ, England

Viking Penguin Inc., 40 West 23rd Street, New York, New York 10010, USA

Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia

Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 2801 John Street, Markham, Ontario, Canada L3R 1B4

Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd, 182-190 Wairau Road, Auckland 10, New Zealand

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England

First published 1980

Reprinted 1984, 1988

Copyright © the Estate of R. M. Ogilvie, 1980

All rights reserved

The Acknowledgements section, which begins on p. 293, constitutes
an extension of this copyright page

Printed and bound in Great Britain by

Cox & Wyman Ltd, Reading

Set in Monotype Bembo

Except in the United States of America,
this book is sold subject to the condition
that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise,
be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated
without the publisher's prior consent in any form of
binding or cover other than that in which it is
published and without a similar condition
including this condition being imposed
on the subsequent purchaser

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	9
1 Roman Society and Literature	11
2 The Early Republic	18
3 The Later Republic	40
4 The Influence of Greece	68
5 Intellectual Curiosity	100
6 Between Republic and Empire	114
7 The Early Empire	161
8 Principate and Protest	183
9 Words and Truth	202
10 The New Dawn	224
11 Full Circle	258
<i>Conclusion</i>	280
<i>Appendix 1 A Selective Bibliography about Roman Writers</i>	281
<i>Appendix 2 A Selective Bibliography on Roman Literature and Civilization</i>	292
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	293
<i>Index</i>	295

PELICAN BOOKS

ROMAN LITERATURE AND SOCIETY

Robert Ogilvie was born in 1932 and educated at Rugby and Balliol College, Oxford. He was a Fellow of Clare College, Cambridge, from 1955 to 1957 and of Balliol from 1957 to 1970. He was headmaster of Tonbridge School from 1970 to 1975 and subsequently Professor of Humanity at the University of St Andrews until his death in November 1981.

His publications include commentaries on the Roman authors Livy and Tacitus, and books on Roman religion, the history of early Rome and Lactantius. He was a Fellow of the British Academy and the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

R. M. OGILVIE

ROMAN LITERATURE
AND
SOCIETY



PENGUIN BOOKS

PENGUIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group

27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ, England

Viking Penguin Inc., 40 West 23rd Street, New York, New York 10010, USA

Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia

Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 2801 John Street, Markham, Ontario, Canada L3R 1B4

Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd, 182-190 Wairau Road, Auckland 10, New Zealand

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England

First published 1980

Reprinted 1984, 1988

Copyright © the Estate of R. M. Ogilvie, 1980

All rights reserved

The Acknowledgements section, which begins on p. 293, constitutes
an extension of this copyright page

Printed and bound in Great Britain by

Cox & Wyman Ltd, Reading

Set in Monotype Bembo

Except in the United States of America,
this book is sold subject to the condition
that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise,
be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated
without the publisher's prior consent in any form of
binding or cover other than that in which it is
published and without a similar condition
including this condition being imposed
on the subsequent purchaser

J. S. C.

Forti et fideli nihil difficile est

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	9
1 Roman Society and Literature	11
2 The Early Republic	18
3 The Later Republic	40
4 The Influence of Greece	68
5 Intellectual Curiosity	100
6 Between Republic and Empire	114
7 The Early Empire	161
8 Principate and Protest	183
9 Words and Truth	202
10 The New Dawn	224
11 Full Circle	258
<i>Conclusion</i>	280
<i>Appendix 1 A Selective Bibliography about Roman Writers</i>	281
<i>Appendix 2 A Selective Bibliography on Roman Literature and Civilization</i>	292
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	293
<i>Index</i>	295

PREFACE

With many excellent and accessible translations of the Latin classics now on the market and with a renewed interest at large in all aspects of the Roman world, it seemed worthwhile to attempt to write a brief survey of Latin literature which would serve as an introduction, for students and others, to the major Latin writers. I have tried, in particular, to relate their works to the evolving social conditions of the times. Inevitably such a study must be derivative, but I have reread every author and tried to form a fresh and independent opinion about him. In the two appendixes I have given brief bibliographies which may be of use.

Acknowledgements for quotations are printed at the end of the book. I am responsible for translations where no translator is named.

I have two particular debts that I should like to acknowledge: first, to Dr Adrian Gratwick, who put his voluminous knowledge of early Latin literature at my disposal, and, secondly, to Mrs May Dick for her skilful and patient typing.

June 1978

R. M. Ogilvie, Errachd

I

ROMAN SOCIETY AND LITERATURE

LITERATURE reflects the interests and prejudices of society. To appreciate Roman literature you have to understand the sort of audiences for which it was written and to know something of the historical background. Not that Virgil or Horace cannot be read today, in translation or in the original, as poets in their right. There have after all been many people like Thomas Burnet, who wrote in 1716: 'I am now at my leisure hours reading Horace with some diligence and find that the world was just the same then that it continues to be now', or Mgr Ronald Knox, who traced his religious life as a 'Spiritual Aeneid'. But this is to read ourselves into ancient literature. The best of classical writers have more to say, if you can make the imaginative leap into the conditions and circumstances of their own time.

Roman authors wrote for a wide variety of audiences, and Latin literature ranges over nearly six centuries, from the plays of Plautus at the beginning of the second century B.C. to the poems of Claudian and the history of Ammianus Marcellinus at the end of the fourth century A.D. Plautus wrote for a single public performance in the theatre; his plays were bought by a magistrate or an agent, and staged as a popular attraction at the games. They survive for us because his popularity ensured that they were repeated, and acting copies, often with considerable alterations, were handed down. Cicero wrote the majority of his speeches to persuade

an immediate audience, either in a court of law or in the Senate. They would have perished for ever, as so much Roman oratory has, if he had not been vain enough to issue them in book form for the enjoyment of his friends. Caesar wrote his *Gallic Wars* as a piece of political propaganda to enhance his position with the Roman nobility and with the electorate. But most writers, poets like Catullus or Horace or Virgil, and historians, like Sallust or Livy, wrote with a small sophisticated audience in mind – an audience drawn from the tightly-knit group of families who comprised the governing class at Rome. They were men who had had a predominantly literary education themselves and who, above all, were imbued with the culture of Greece. They were rich and able to indulge the leisure which the political system afforded them. Although periodically called upon to hold demanding magistracies at home and in the provinces, senators were not allowed to engage directly in trade.

There were three chief ways in which an author would bring his work to the attention of his audience. The commonest was by giving a public recitation. Roman literature, it should be remembered, was almost always intended to be read aloud and we miss much of its impact by silent, visual reading. Indeed it was a matter of surprise that Caesar and St Ambrose could read silently to themselves. An aspiring author hired a hall and invited his friends to a reading. Livy, we are told, drew only small audiences to his readings but those who came came because of his eloquence and the beauty of his personality. Tacitus relates that audiences in his day have become so discriminating that they expect to carry away some memorable and witty quotation from any such performance. Claques were hired to fill the benches. 'The reciter', says Seneca, 'brings an enormous historical work, written very small, tightly rolled up: after he has read a considerable part of it, he says "I will stop now, if you like." Immediately there

is a shout of "More, more!" from his hearers who would really like to see him struck dumb on the spot.' When the Younger Pliny realized that he read poetry badly, he employed one of his freedmen but was worried how he should react: should he behave as a disinterested spectator or should he enter into the spirit of the performance? In the satirical poet Persius we have a lurid account of an affected reciter draped in a billowing snow-white toga, with curled hair and a huge diamond ring on his finger, lolling back in his high chair as he began to declaim in melting tones. Roman authors hoped that as a result of public recitations the word would be spread around about their newest work and that they would receive constructive criticism to improve it.

Works were also launched at private parties, especially dinner-parties. Virgil left the *Aeneid* incomplete at his death in 19 B.C. but he had recited parts of it, especially the end of Book 6, to Augustus before he died. An older contemporary of Virgil, Varro (see p. 101), says that the host at a dinner-party should choose passages to be read which were both uplifting and amusing. But guests were not always so lucky. The poet Martial, at the end of the first century A.D., writes: 'There is one reason, and one reason only, why you give a dinner-party, Ligurius. You want the chance to recite your terrible poems. I have taken off my slippers. The fish and lettuce are served. Here comes Book 1. The main course is delayed so that we can hear Book 2. Then, before dessert, Book 3, Book 4, Book 5. If you serve roast pig like this, course after course, it is revolting. Give those horrible poems to the fishmonger to wrap fish and chips in. Otherwise no one will ever come and dine with you.' The habit lasted long. At the beginning of the third century A.D. the emperor Severus Alexander was still giving literary dinner-parties. When he dined with his friends, he invited Ulpian or other learned men who, he said, refreshed and fed him. When he