Virgil's Schoolboys: The Poetics of Pedagogy in Renaissance England

This book weaves a three-part story around the reception of a group of ancient poems in the grammar schools of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. First, it argues that the ancient Roman poet Publius Vergilius Maro (70-19 BCE) is an agile theorist of the nature and mechanics of instruction. Second, the book offers a long view of pedagogical engagements with a sequence of self-reflexive studies of instruction in his canonical poems, emphasizing how grammarians, commentators, editors, schoolmasters, and translators responded to this aspect of Virgil's achievement in the midst of their own attempts to make his poems teachable. Third, the book contends that complex responses to Virgil's meditations on instruction pervade early modern grammar texts, miscellaneous schoolbooks, and works by writers such as Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1516/17-1547), Edmund Spenser (1552-1599), Francis Bacon (1561-1626), and John Milton (1608-1674). Identifying and tracking traditions of interest in Virgil's preoccupation with instruction, the book argues, further, that humanist pedagogy is characterized not only by an evolving commitment to classical Latinity and the studia humanitatis, but also by a commitment to studying the dilating space that separates the master from his schoolboys. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England the discourse of 'mastery', of self-sufficient and pre-eminent achievement, frequently struggles to conceive of itself in any form other than the paradigmatic relationship between schoolmaster and scholar.

Additional Metadata

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