

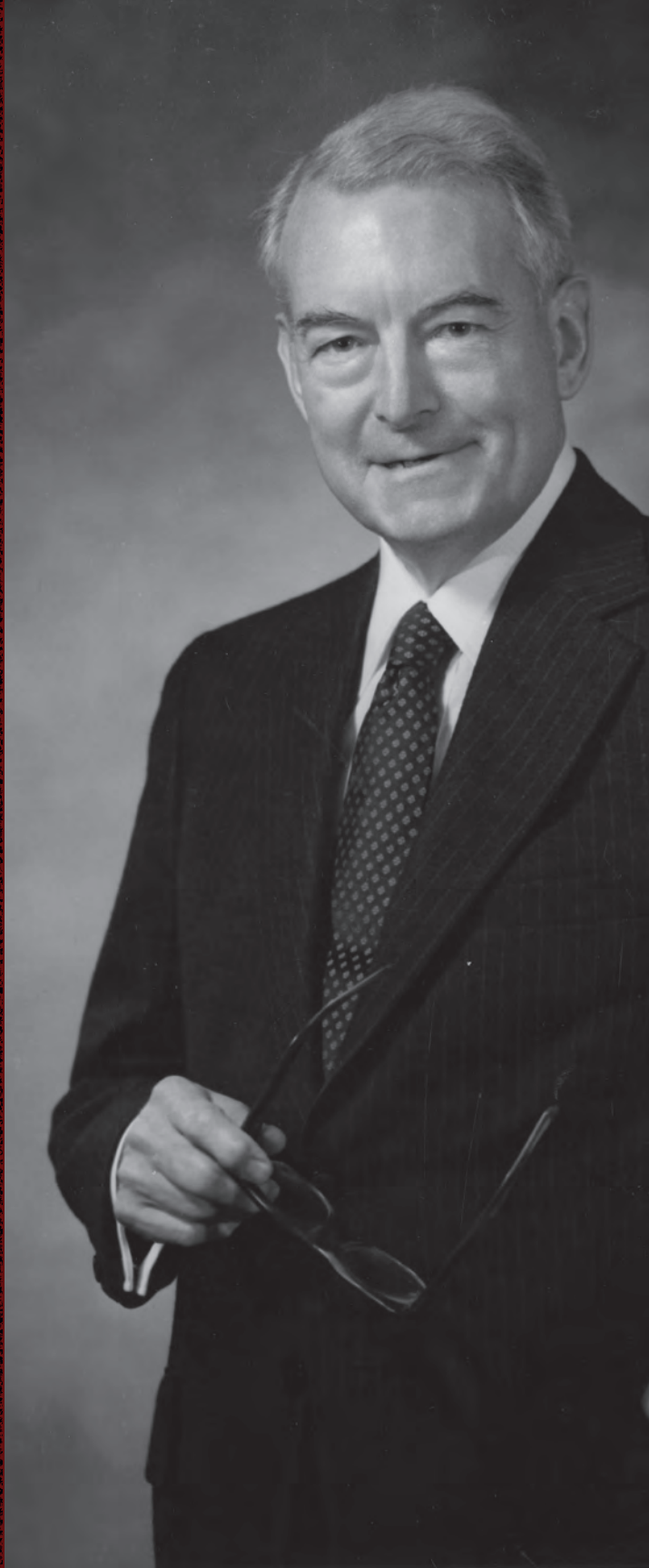
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*The*  
CLASSICAL  
LEGACY  
*of*  
GILBERT  
HIGHET

*An In-Depth  
Retrospect*

Robert J. Ball

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The Classical Legacy of Gilbert Highet:  
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# THE CLASSICAL LEGACY OF GILBERT HIGHET: AN IN-DEPTH RETROSPECT

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## Dedication

For Gilbert Highet (*in memoriam*),  
For his son Keith (*in memoriam*),  
For his grandson Ian, and  
For his great-grandson Gilbert (aka Gil)

\* \* \*

*et quasi cursores vitae lampada tradunt.*  
And like runners, they pass on the torch of life.  
—Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 2.79

*Degno di tanta reverenza in vista ...*  
His bearing filled me with such reverence ...  
—Dante, *Purgatorio* 1.32

**And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche.**  
And gladly would he learn and gladly teach.  
—Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, *General Prologue* 308



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## PREFACE

What will you think about me when I die,  
Helen? There won't be an official life—  
a paragraph at most ...

—Gilbert Highet, "Post-Obit" (undated),  
final entry for Highet, G. in Works Cited

A few years ago, I began to think about the self-effacing statement (quoted above) with which classicist Gilbert Highet began a poem he had addressed to his wife, the novelist Helen MacInnes. He wrote that poem toward the end of his life, when he apparently believed (one cannot know how strongly) that, in spite of everything he had achieved, he would not be remembered in any substantial way.

Although many tributes and testimonials about Highet (including my own) appeared after his death, nothing was ever published that one could regard by any stretch of the imagination as "an official life." An official life should not only contain facts about and memories of the subject but also demonstrate broad-based research, steeped in considerable detail and documentation, while treating controversial issues objectively. Advances in electronic technology, which evolved during the more than forty years since Highet's death, have enabled me to extract much useful information from a variety of databases critical for this biographical undertaking. These advances have also enabled me to incorporate in this undertaking updated bibliographies of publications by and about Highet, in which regard publications about him or referring to him have more than doubled since his passing.

This fully documented examination of Highet's life, teaching, and scholarship, enhanced by fully updated bibliographies of publications by and about him, should (I hope) fill in the gap for an official life. Highet, a unique and towering figure in Classics in the mid-twentieth century, whom I had the great fortune of having as my mentor during my doctoral studies at Columbia University, deserves nothing less.

Robert J. Ball  
Professor Emeritus of Classics  
University of Hawaii



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Ian Highet, representing the Gilbert Highet Estate, for encouraging me to pursue this biographical retrospect about his grandfather and for authorizing me to reproduce several unpublished documents written by and about him;

Robert Scott, former head, Digital Humanities Center at Columbia University, for introducing me to a variety of databases critical for this biographical undertaking and for helping me locate a number of elusive publications;

Jocelyn Wilk, university archivist at Columbia University, for directing me to unpublished material about Highet not located in the Gilbert Highet Papers but in other holdings of Columbia's Rare Book and Manuscript Library;

Billie Jean Collins, director of Lockwood Press and a well-published Hittitologist, for being "intrigued" by my manuscript from the time I first approached her and for enabling me to produce the kind of memorial volume I envisioned;

Judith Hallett, professor emerita of Classics at the University of Maryland, for reading a draft of my book, for offering incisive comments, and for regarding Highet as one of very few classicists worthy of a retrospective monograph;

Matthew Santirocco, professor of Classics at New York University, for reading a draft of my book, for providing valuable suggestions, and for supporting my view that in his day Highet was the most celebrated classical scholar in America.



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## ABBREVIATIONS

For Classics and Classics-friendly journals cited in the bibliographies at the end of this retrospect, I have used the abbreviations in *L'Année Philologique*, which I have also listed below with their full titles (multiword where applicable). For journals and periodicals not indexed in *L'Année Philologique*, directed primarily at a general audience and containing information important for this undertaking, I have listed their titles in full in the bibliographies at the end of this retrospect.

<i>AJPh</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
<i>Arion</i>	<i>Arion</i>
<i>C&amp;M</i>	<i>Classica et Mediaevalia</i>
<i>CB</i>	<i>Classical Bulletin</i>
<i>CHum</i>	<i>Computers and the Humanities</i>
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Classical Journal</i>
<i>ClAnt</i>	<i>Classical Antiquity</i>
<i>CO</i>	<i>Classical Outlook</i>
<i>CPh</i>	<i>Classical Philology</i>
<i>CQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
<i>CR</i>	<i>Classical Review</i>
<i>CW</i>	<i>Classical World</i>
<i>G&amp;R</i>	<i>Greece &amp; Rome</i>
<i>Gnomon</i>	<i>Gnomon</i>
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>
<i>Hermes</i>	<i>Hermes</i>
<i>HSPh</i>	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
<i>ICS</i>	<i>Illinois Classical Studies</i>
<i>IJCT</i>	<i>International Journal of the Classical Tradition</i>
<i>JHI</i>	<i>Journal of the History of Ideas</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>MD</i>	<i>Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici</i>
<i>PAPHS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society</i>
<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>
<i>PVS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Virgil Society</i>
<i>QS</i>	<i>Quaderni di storia</i>
<i>SO</i>	<i>Symbolae Osloenses</i>



<i>SyllClass</i>	<i>Syllecta Classica</i>
<i>TAPA</i>	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association*</i>
<i>TLS</i>	<i>Times Literary Supplement</i>
<i>Vergilius</i>	<i>Vergilius</i>

\* The full title of this journal applies to articles published in it until 2014, when the American Philological Association became the Society for Classical Studies.

## INTRODUCTION

Gilbert Highet (1906–1978) was one of Columbia University’s greatest teachers and in his day the most celebrated classical scholar in America. One may regard his life and career as both extraordinary and controversial—a subject touched on in many short articles and considered in more detail in a few relatively long tributes, including my own.<sup>1</sup> Now, over forty years after his death, a fresh retrospect seems appropriate, as a way of presenting new information about him and evaluating his enduring classical legacy for the twenty-first century reader.<sup>2</sup>

This fresh in-depth retrospect consists of three chapters: (1) a review of Highet’s career; (2) his legacy as a teacher; and (3) his legacy as a scholar. The chapter on his career looks at his studies at Glasgow and Balliol (Oxford), his initial appointment at St. John’s (Oxford), and his tenured appointment at Columbia, interrupted only by his top-secret World War II military service. The chapter on his teaching includes his achievements at St. John’s, his legendary performance in the Columbia classroom, especially as a teacher of Vergil, and an evaluation of his books *The Art of Teaching* and *The Immortal Profession*. The chapter on his scholarship examines the five of his twenty-one books that exhibit a strong classical content: *The Classical Tradition*, *Juvenal the Satirist*, *Poets in a Landscape*, *The Anatomy of Satire*, and *The Speeches in Vergil’s Aeneid*. Following Highet’s practice in all but the last of these five books (a book designed for specialists), I have aimed the text at the general and the scholarly reader, and the footnotes—like Highet’s, often considerably long—primarily at a scholarly audience. I have also numbered all the footnotes in a single continuous sequence to provide the reader with the easiest way of connecting the many cross-listed footnotes with one another—those found later in the book with those appearing earlier in the book.

This retrospect contains, beyond the list of works cited, two bibliographies updating those about Highet and his writings published over thirty-five years ago. The first bibliography lists a series of articles written by him, not included in and to be inserted in the appropriate sections of the thirty-page bibliography of his approximately one thousand publications.<sup>3</sup> The second bibliography lists, as far as I have been able to de-

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1. See Ball 1983b and 2001 (repr. 2006), both published by Columbia.

2. This retrospect includes some information about Highet already published but enhanced by an in-depth documentation not found previously, while emphasizing new information about him gleaned from numerous untapped published and unpublished sources.

3. See Ball 1983a, 349–78 for the long and impressive bibliography of publications by Highet.

termine, all significant items published about him or referring to him up to the present time, which have more than doubled since his passing.<sup>4</sup>

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4. See Ball 1983a, 13–14 for the useful but outdated bibliography of publications about Highet.