

Selected Quotations on Plautus and Comedy

“Plautus the glory of the Latin tongue” –
Aulus Gellius, *Atticae Noctes* 19.8.6

“Seneca cannot be too heavy nor Plautus too light.” - Polonius to Hamlet trumpeting the arrival of “the best players in the world”,
Shakespeare, *Hamlet* II.2.395

“Captured Greece captured its savage conqueror.” – Horace, *Epistle* 2.1.156-157

TERENCE, 2nd Prologue to *Hecyra*: “I again bring before you the *Hecyra*, which I have never been allowed to act before you in silence; such misfortunes have so overwhelmed it... The first time, when I began to act this Play, the vauntings of boxers, the expectation of a rope-dancer, added to which, the throng of followers, the noise, the clamor of the women, caused me to retire from your presence before the time... I brought it on again. In the first Act I pleased; when in the meantime a rumor spread that gladiators were about to be exhibited; the populace flock together, make a tumult, clamor aloud, and fight for their places: meantime, I was unable to maintain my place.”



PLAUTUS, *Curculio* 288-95: “Then there are those Greeks, who stroll about in their foreign little cloaks, their heads all muffled up, their garments stuffed full of books — and of handouts from wealthy patrons! They stand about, chatting in groups with one another, the no good runaways! They block your path, always in the way, as they promenade about with their fancy philosophical sayings. You see them all the time drinking in the wine stands (whenever they've managed to filch some cash, that is): their heads still cloaked, they toss down their warmed wine and then march along, so serious looking — and so drunk! If I bump into any of them, I'll knock a barley-groat fart out of each and every one of them!”

ARISTOPHANES, *Peace*: (a parody of Bellerophon’s flight to heaven on Pegasus)

Trygaeus: Oh! Zeus, what art thou going to do for our people? Dost thou not see this, that our cities will soon be but empty husks?

First Servant: As I told you, that is his form of madness. [65] There you have a sample of his follies. When his trouble first began to seize him, he said to himself, “By what means could I go straight to Zeus ?” Then he made himself very slender little ladders [70] and so clambered up towards heaven; but he soon came hurtling down again and broke his head. Yesterday, to our misfortune, he went out and brought us back this thoroughbred, but from where I know not, this great beetle, whose groom he has forced me to become. [75] He himself caresses it as though it were a horse, saying, “Oh! my little Pegasus , my noble aerial steed, may your wings soon bear me straight to Zeus !” But what is my master doing? I must stoop down to look through this hole. Oh! great gods! Here! neighbors, run here quick! [80] here is my master flying off mounted on his beetle as if on horseback.

Tractatus Coislinianus (thought to summarize **Aristotle**’s treatise on comedy): “Old Comedy overemphasized laughter; New Comedy disregarded it.