

# Rome and the Mysterious Orient



THREE PLAYS BY

**Plautus**

Translated with Introductions and Notes by

**Amy Richlin**

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To two great lyricists, Sylvia Richlin and Doris Zuckman  
and to Sandra Joshel, marking twenty-five years of comedy



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#### TRANSLATIONS, COMMENTARIES, AND SPECIAL STUDIES OF THE PLAYS IN THIS VOLUME

These represent only the tip of an enormous iceberg and constitute only a short list of items students and teachers might find particularly useful.

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##### *Poenulus*

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#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

##### *Primary Sources on Roman Ethnic Attitudes*

Most of the writers recommended in the introduction are available either in the Penguin series or in the Loeb series, which carries the translation on a page facing the Greek or Latin text; most research libraries will have a complete set of Loeb. For a useful translation of Mela's geography, see F. E. Romer, *Pomponius Mela's Description of the World* (Ann

Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998). The translation of Petronius by J. P. Sullivan in the Penguin series is funny in British English; the translation by William Arrowsmith (New York: New American Library, 1990) is funny in American English, as is, more recently, the translation by Sarah Ruden (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000). Roman satirists other than Petronius do not translate well; Rolfe Humphries, *The Satires of Juvenal* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958), is about the best, but out of print.

#### *On the History of Rome in the Mid-Republic*

The standard reference work is *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd ed., vol. 8, *Rome and the Mediterranean to 133 B.C.*, edited by A. E. Astin, F. W. Walbank, M. W. Frederiksen, and R. M. Ogilvie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). This volume contains not only narrative histories of wars throughout the Mediterranean during the years in which Plautus's plays were performed, but intellectual histories of the period, including drama. The lengthy section on Greek involvement eastward into India opens up a vast hybrid culture, which Persia dominated. For a shorter version, I highly recommend Errington 1972, listed above.

#### *On Orientalism*

The standard work is Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). An avalanche of work in postcolonial theory accompanied and followed this book; for a useful reader, see Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), which includes a whole section on hybridity. There is a shortage of work on colonialism and the cultural work of comedy; excellent, if you can find it, is the lavishly illustrated *Nothing but the Same Old Story: The Roots of Anti-Irish Racism*, put out by a group called Information on Ireland in 1984.

#### *On Roman Slavery*

On slaves and resistance in the Republic, see Shaw 2001 (listed above), a collection of primary sources; and Keith R. Bradley, *Slavery and Rebellion in the Roman World, 140 B.C.–70 B.C.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998). For a slave's-eye view, which starts in the first century C.E., because slaves' inscriptions do not start in bulk until then, see Joshel 1992. On women and slaves, see Joshel and Murnaghan 1998.

#### *On Roman Ideas about Race and Ethnicity*

For an introduction to the question of why this issue might matter to American students, see Shelley P. Haley, "Black Feminist Thought and Classics: Re-membering, Re-claiming, Re-empowering," in *Feminist Theory and the Classics*, ed. Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz and Amy Richlin, 23–43 (New York: Routledge, 1993). The pioneering study of race, Africa, and Rome, with many illustrations, is Frank M. Snowden Jr., *Blacks in Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970); it was followed by Lloyd A. Thompson,

*Romans and Blacks* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), and most recently by Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), in which see esp. pp. 304–51, 371–405. For a thought-provoking treatment of Roman racism as directed northwards, see A. N. Sherwin-White, *Racial Prejudice in Imperial Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).