

BOOK REVIEW

Plautus, vol. I: Amphitryon; The Comedy of Asses; The Pot of Gold; The Two Bacchises; The Captives. Edited and translated by Wolfgang DE MELO. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2011. Pp. cxxxiii + 628. Hardcover, \$24.00/£15.95. ISBN 978-0-674-99653-3.

Plautus, vol. II: Casina; The Casket Comedy; Curculio; Epidicus; The Two Menaechmuses. Edited and translated by Wolfgang DE MELO. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2011. Pp. x + 562. Hardcover, \$24.00/£15.95. ISBN 978-0-674-99678-6.

Plautus, vol. III: The Merchant; The Braggart Soldier; The Ghost; The Persian. Edited and translated by Wolfgang DE MELO. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2011. Pp. x + 569. Hardcover, \$24.00/£15.95. ISBN 978-0-674-99682-3.

Plautus, vol. IV: The Little Carthaginian; Pseudolus; The Rope. Edited and translated by Wolfgang DE MELO. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2012. Pp. xi + 571. Hardcover, \$24.00/£15.95. ISBN 978-0-674-99986-2.

The Loeb's of Plautus by Paul Nixon (Cambridge, MA, 1916–38) have served us well for many years but are showing their age. Wolfgang de Melo's new Loeb's (one volume remains after those reviewed here) are therefore most welcome. De Melo has not only provided a worthy updated successor to Nixon, but he has gone well beyond his predecessor in many ways to produce a work that will be of considerable value both to students and to scholars.

As befits the Loeb format, de Melo's aims in terms of textual criticism are limited: he does not produce a full apparatus criticus. Unlike Nixon, however, who for the most part simply reproduced Friedrich Leo's text (Berlin, 1895–6), de Melo has clearly thought long and hard about Plautus' text, both incorporating the work of contemporary editors and doing some emending of his own. The

result is a text that, while by no means definitive, is superior to previous full-corpus texts of Plautus, including Wallace Lindsay's OCT (Oxford, 1904–5). Particularly notable are de Melo's work on the lacunose *Cistellaria* (this benefits much from de Melo's consultation with Walter Stockert, who has recently completed a critical text of the play [Urbino, 2009]), and on the Punic passages of *Poenulus*, described in a long appendix to that play. Inevitably, of course, there is room for disagreement. In spite of the authority of Roberto Danese (*Asinaria* [Urbino, 2004]), I remain skeptical that Diabolus and not Argyrippus delivers *Asinaria* 127ff. Nor do I find de Melo's transposition of *Menaechmi* 72–6 to earlier in the prologue persuasive (adopted from Adrian Gratwick's *Menaechmi* [Cambridge, 1993]).

Most readers will probably turn to these volumes for the translation as much as for the Latin text. Here again de Melo is decidedly superior to Nixon, much of whose translation now seems painfully archaic. De Melo's English versions, appropriately, are generally quite literal. As is often the case with such close translations, they sometimes sound stilted: they will not serve well as texts for performance, and students seeking a "feel" for Plautus' exuberant Latin would do better to turn to translations that are less exact but more lively. They will, however, prove an excellent guide for those seeking greater understanding of the Latin.

De Melo also does a better job than Nixon at annotating his translations. Obscure passages and places where Latin puns cannot be recreated literally are usually well explained with notes on points of Roman culture, history, Latin semantics, and other areas. De Melo has a good eye not only for items that might give students difficulty, but also for areas where some additional information will make our understanding richer. He notes, for example, that when Daemones invites Gripus to dinner at the end of *Rudens*, he suggests that the slave has been freed, even though Daemones does not explicitly manumit him.

Where de Melo differs most from Nixon is in his introductory material. He begins his first volume with a 121-page introduction that includes discussions of Plautus' life, the history of ancient comedy (including Plautus' Greek and Italian sources and questions of adaptation), themes and characteristics of Plautine comedy, Plautus' language and meter, questions of performance, the history of Plautus' text, and (very briefly) Plautus' influence. Some areas here could be improved. De Melo is to my mind overly skeptical regarding native Italian influence on Plautus; and while he covers well the iambic senarius and the trochaic septenarius, other meters, most notably the very important iambic septenarius,

get short shrift. De Melo's claim that Terence's characters, because they are sympathetic, are unrealistic, seems unnecessarily cynical. De Melo perhaps spends more time on the intricacies of Plautus' Latin than is necessary in this context. All in all, though, de Melo's ambitious opening is an excellent introduction to the plays. Particularly praiseworthy are de Melo's clear account of the manuscript tradition and his extensive bibliography.

De Melo also offers, in contrast to Nixon, introductions to individual plays. Each includes a synopsis of the play and discussion of the Greek original and the date of the play's original performance. These discussions are inevitably somewhat speculative, but de Melo is consistently cautious and forthright about his assumptions. De Melo generally avoids aesthetic judgments and broader questions of literary criticism in these introductions. When he does judge the plays, he sometimes seems a bit out of touch with current critical work, as when he concludes that *Persa* is "unpleasant" and *Asinaria* "less than edifying." Each introduction ends with a brief bibliography that includes editions, commentaries and other secondary scholarship. These feature, admirably, works in French, German, and Italian as well as English, but they seem rather idiosyncratic, sometimes including discussions of minor points and ignoring important studies of whole plays.

Finally, de Melo includes *schemata metrorum* for all the plays. These are vastly superior to those of Lindsay's Oxford texts. Those interested in the details of the polymetric sections will still want to turn to Cesare Questa's *T. Macci Plauti Cantica* (Urbino, 1995), but de Melo's metrical appendices should now be the standard resource for those following metrical changes throughout whole plays.

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