

Three Comedies: Miles Gloriosus/Pseudolus/Rudens (Masters of Latin Literature)



A major comic artist in Republican Rome, Plautus left a legacy of twenty extremely inventive comedies. Ostensibly Latin versions of Greek plays staged in Athens several generations earlier, they display an exuberance and zany sense of humor that are distinctly Roman. Peter L. Smith here offers lively and colloquial English verse translations of three plays: *Miles Gloriosus* (The Braggart Warrior), *Pseudolus* (The Cheat), and *Rudens* (The Rope). In their quality and variety, the three plays represent an ideal sampling of Plautus work, and the translations themselves are meant to be enjoyed as living theater. *Miles Gloriosus* is a comic assault on human vanity and self-importance, as manifested in the persona of an absurdly swaggering military officer. *Pseudolus* features a scheming slave of quick wit and fertile imagination, who assists his well-born but dim-witted young master in pursuing a seemingly hopeless love affair. *Rudens* is a romantic comedy set on the North African coast, in which a pathetic young woman (kidnapped in infancy) survives a shipwreck, escapes the clutches of a villainous pimp, and discovers her parents. Smith has written a substantial general introduction on the background of ancient Roman comedy, including various aspects of theater production, and brief critical essays introducing the plays. Notes and bibliographical information are also included. Although Plautus created popular entertainment for a general audience, he was a literary artist of remarkable dexterity. His plays have become classics of the Western tradition, and their direct influence has extended from Shakespeare and Moliere through Stephen Sondheim. These masterly new translations will be welcomed by anyone with an interest in the development of comedy and in classical drama and its performance.

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