Captive Greece captured, in turn, her uncivilized
Conquerors, and brought the arts to rustic Latium.
So coarse Saturnian metres faded, and good taste
Banished venom: though traces of our rural
Past remained for many a year, and still remain.
Not till later did Roman thought turn to Greek models,
And in the calm after the Punic Wars began to ask
What Sophocles, Thespis, Aeschylus might offer.
Romans experimented, seeing if they could rework
Such things effectively, noble and quick by nature,
They pleased: happily bold, with tragic spirit enough,
Yet novices, thinking it shameful, fearing, to revise.
Some think that Comedy, making use of daily life,
Needs little sweat, but in fact it’s more onerous,
Less forgiving. Look at how badly Plautus handles
A youthful lover’s part, or a tight-fisted father,
Or treacherous pimp, what a Dossenus he makes,
Sly villain, amongst his gluttonous parasites,
How slipshod he is in sliding about the stage.
Oh, he’s keen to fill his pockets, and after that
Cares little if it fails, or stands on its own two feet.
A cold audience deflates, a warm one inspires
Those whom Fame’s airy chariot bears to the light:
So slight, so small a thing it is, shatters and restores
Minds that crave praise. Farewell to the comic theatre,
If winning the palm makes me rich, its denial poor.