

The Department of English

RAJA NARENDRALAL KHAN WOMEN'S COLLEGE

GOPE PALACE, MIDNAPORE, WEST BENGAL

Offers

COURSE MATERIAL ON:

The Pot of Gold

For

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Paper- CC8 (European Classical Literature)

Provided by:

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Faculty

The Department of English, Raja Narendralal Khan Women's College

1. Titus Maccius Plautus (circa 254-184BC): Life and Works

Not much is known about the life of Plautus. Titus Maccius Plautus was born around 254 BC in Sarsina, Umbria, in present day Italy. As a young boy he left his village and joined a travelling theatre group. It is believed that he later reached Rome, where he began to work as a stage assistant and actor. He is even said to have worked as a carpenter on the sets, according to William Harris. Plautus was exposed to Greek theatre and Greek New Comedy, especially the comedy of Menander, when he joined the Roman army as a soldier and travelled across Southern Italy. Plautus' earliest plays, *Addictus* and *Saturio*, were written while he was still a hand-miller, travelling from door to door. His comedies became a success and he soon became a full-time dramatist. Plautus chose to rework Menander's plays instead of just translating them. He introduced local Roman colour in the plays. Though he borrowed the plot and characters from the original play, he would add his own brand of slapstick comedy and raucous humour to the play. Plautus was instrumental in introducing music, song and dance as a part of plot in his plays. He is said to have written more than 130 plays, but we have access to only 21 of them in the present age. They are written in Latin and are possibly the earliest works of Roman literature we have access to. Some of his most famous works are *The Pot of Gold*, *The Menaechmi*, *Stichus*, *Amphitryon* and *The Swaggering Soldier*. However, researchers face problems while dealing with his works since several of his manuscripts are incomplete. Plautus is counted among the two greatest dramatists of the Roman comedy—"Fabula Palliata" or "Palliata Comoedia", the other of course being Terence.

Menander was a huge influence on Plautus, and *Aulularia* is thought to be inspired from one of Menander's lost comedies. Plautus' comedy is mostly situational, with a lot of complications in the action, which may arise from mistaken identity, deliberate concealing of information or the villainy of a wily character. It relies equally on surprises and the predictability of familiar characters and situations. The satire is genial in tone, and whatever the outcome, the characters learn something from the action of the play. Plautine comedy gives us an insight into Roman local life, because even though he is influenced by the Greek New Comedy, he places his own characters in his contemporary society and makes them speak Latin. Unlike Terence, who wrote his plays in Greek and set them in Athens, Plautus changed the settings of his plays to several places across Italy.

2. Roman Comedy:

The Roman Comedy was influenced by Greek comic theatre when the Romans conquered Greece. This led to several Latin adaptations of Greek comedy. The Roman playwrights rewrote and adapted the plays into Latin, keeping the scene of the action in Athens, but introducing Roman characters and topical situations. The Roman plays were performed for the general public thrice a year. They were also performed at times of celebration, as when a high official took up a new charge. The actors were often slaves, who could hope for freedom if they impressed an important official with their performance. The Roman theatres too were modelled on the Greek theatres, but unlike the Athenian theatre, its audience was not representative of all classes. The Roman audience largely comprised of men from the lower classes. To cater to this audience, the comedy was coarse and vulgar.

Given the composition of the audience, which was no better than a mob, the Roman dramatists gave a prologue at the beginning of the plays which explained the opening of the story and gave hints about how the plot would unfold. All Plautus' plays have prologues by a character of the play which

introduces the audience to the complications of the plot. The stage was a plain platform, with a wall as a background. The wall may have doors which could represent the houses of some characters. The Roman actors' speeches were accompanied by a flautist sometimes. This gave the impression of a recitation. Some of the dialogues were even set to music, like songs. Sometimes a singer came on the stage to sing a song, while the comedian merely mimed the scene. The Roman dramatists tried to sustain the interest of their audience at all times. They introduced local colour into the play and tried to make it as topical as possible. Plautus used Athens as the scene of his plays but he picked characters, dialogues and situations which the audience would identify with and enjoy. Even though he drew his plots from Menander, his sketches of the common Roman people found great popularity. Plautus was practical in his outlook, and made sure his plays were bawdy and vulgar enough to appeal to his audience's tastes.

3. *The Pot of Gold*

3.1 Introduction:

Like all of Plautus' plays, *The Pot of Gold* too is set in Athens. Yet, the themes and issues he highlights are Roman. His comedies are a reflection of the society of his time. The characters he describes help the modern researcher to build an idea of the manner in which society functioned in Plautus' time. *The Pot of Gold* gives us an insight into Roman life at that time—especially the position of the women and slaves.

3.2 A Brief Mapping of the Plot:

Lar Familiaris presents the prologue of the play, which sets the stage for the action that follows. It is by Lar Familiaris that the audience is informed that Euclio's grandfather, being a great miser, had buried a pot of gold in the central hall of his house. This wealth had remained undiscovered until Lar Familiaris, in his pity for Euclio's impoverished condition, and his appreciation of Phaedria's devotion, guided Euclio to the treasure. While Euclio is preoccupied with hiding his treasure, his daughter Phaedria has been seduced by Lyconides, a youth who wishes to marry her as she is expecting their child. Oblivious to this, Euclio has accepted his neighbour Megadorus' proposal of marriage for his daughter. Megadorus happens to be Lyconides' uncle. Lyconides confesses his love for Phaedria to her father, and while he does so, his slave steals the pot of gold. The manuscript of the play which survives contains the action only upto this point. Most editors who have completed the text, including E.F. Watling, have done so from summaries that have survived or bits of dialogues which are available to them. From the summaries available to researchers, they have been able to fathom that the ending of the play is happy, with Lyconides and Phaedria marrying each other, and miserly Euclio uncharacteristically deciding to give them the pot of gold as a wedding gift.

4. Issues and Brief Analysis

4.1 Significance of the Title:

Megadorus' speech against dowry can be seen as Plautus' comment on Roman practices. It gives an insight into the low position women held in the social ladder. Yet, *The Pot of Gold* is first and foremost a satire on miserliness. Euclio's desperate desire to protect his pot of gold makes him restless and suspicious of everyone around him. There is comic irony in the incident where Euclio himself

facilitates the slave's access to the treasure. Euclio maintains a farce of poverty, even though he has become rich on finding the gold. He even attends a meeting to seek donations and projects himself as a needy old man. Euclio's assent to Megadorus' proposal for Phaedria stems from his happiness at not having to provide a dowry for her. Plautus stresses his contempt of Euclio's miserliness by giving the steward Strobilus scenes where he narrates stories about Euclio's stinginess. For instance, he suggests that if someone stole a grain of salt from Euclio, he would see it as a serious burglary. The moral that the play presents is that miserliness is a great vice. The love for riches is a source of anxiety. Euclio learns this lesson at the end of the play and is shown to willingly give it away to Lyconides.

4.2 Analysing the Plot:

The two main strands of the plot are Euclio's desperate antics to keep his pot of gold hidden from prospective thieves and Phaedria's affair with Lyconides. Megadorus' interest in Phaedria complicates both plot lines. Euclio suspects Megadorus' sudden interest in Phaedria as an attempt to rob him of his treasure. On the other hand, his marriage proposal interferes with Lyconides' desire to marry Phaedria. Both these plot lines are interwoven to present situations which cause tremendous laughter. Puns, jokes, ribaldry and good comic timing keeps the audience riveted to the action. Plautus also relied heavily on music and songs, which are unfortunately lost to the modern-day audience, which add variety to the visual experience.

The Greek New Comedy was a major influence on Plautus' plays. Plautus borrows several elements of this dramatic tradition. Thought to be inspired by Menander's play *Dyskolos*, *The Pot of Gold* has a well constructed plot. Even though the conclusion of the play is missing, translators have been able to reconstruct the ending with hints in the prologue and contemporary summaries available. The 'Acrostic Argument' which prefaced some versions of the play, along with a supplement written at the end of other versions helped translators to assume an ending in which Euclio gives away the gold as a dowry for his daughter.

The play has a very compact structure. There are no digressions to distract the audience from the main storyline. Even the minor characters, such as the steward and the cooks, throw more light on Euclio's character apart from contributing to the comic element of the play. As with all Roman plays, Plautus maintains the Unities of Time, Place and Action in the play. The action of the play revolves around the theme of avarice and miserliness. The entire play takes place within a short span of a few hours in a local street of Athens.

4.3 Stock Characters:

Comic drama has always used stock characters. A stock character is a character which is a common social stereotype. They are most commonly used to add to the comic elements of the play. However, some playwrights have used stock characters to serve other purposes too, such as to further the action of the play or act as foils to other characters. Stock characters have typical names or qualities which represent a type, and this makes it simple for the audience to recognise the character and place it in a certain context. In Roman comedy, the miser, the intelligent servant and the braggart soldier are common stock characters. Elizabethan comedy's most common stock character is the Fool—Feste, Touchstone and Bottom from Shakespeare's plays being some examples. Yet, like Plautus, Shakespeare

also developed his stock characters into more than a flat character. He gave them sympathetic aspects which made them more complex and interesting.

One of the major theatrical devices that Plautus relies on to generate the comedy on stage is the presence of stock characters. Euclio as the old miser is a typical stock character he uses as a protagonist. Plautus presents him in a genial light. Even though he acts greedily, Plautus redeems him in the end when he learns a lesson and appears to be just a good-hearted person who had been misguided by his greed. His first reaction to Megadorus' marriage proposal for his daughter is a suspicion that he may be after his gold. Yet, being the miser he is, he gladly agrees when Megadorus not only does not demand any dowry, but even offers to pay for the entire wedding.

The old yet lusty bachelor is another stock character that Plautus uses. His Megadorus generates much laughter as the lusty old man thinking of marrying the young and beautiful Phaedria. A major part of the play's humour comes from the lavish and elaborate preparations for his wedding. Plautus manages to draw an interesting parallel between Euclio's lust for his gold and Megadorus' lust for Phaedria. At the end of the play, like Euclio, Megadorus too is shown to be kind-hearted when he allows Lyconides and Phaedria to be married.

The third typical stock character Plautus uses in the play is the intelligent servant. Staphyla is Euclio's maid, yet is shown to be far more compassionate and sensible than he is. Through the action of the play, she shows her concern for Euclio's increasingly strange behaviour, and for Phaedria's pregnancy. Lyconides' slave too is a clever character, who is able to steal Euclio's gold despite all his precautions. The slave is a comic figure. He is a stock character—the intelligent servant who gets the better of his masters. His soliloquy on stage—as he waits for Lyconides—reveals to the audience what he thinks of himself. He enumerates the ways in which he has made himself useful to his master. Lyconides is the youth Phaedria wants to marry, as she is expecting his child. Along with the other minor characters, like the steward and the cooks, the slave's speeches provide the audience with a lot of amusement. Lyconides' slave plays a significant role in the development of the plot. He overhears Euclio speaking aloud about the location of his treasure and steals it, leading to Euclio's total breakdown. This incident is instrumental in Lyconides winning Euclio's favour, when he manages to retrieve Euclio's gold and return it to him through Megadorus. This makes Euclio readily accept him as Phaedria's suitor.

C. Stace opines that the slave's character is the key to understanding Plautine originality. Plautus was known to have adapted Greek plays, yet it is in the characters that he shows his originality when he brings in nuances which were not present in the original. Stace speaks of the different kinds of slaves that Plautus employs s characters in the play. Plautus' plays are full of instances of the "servus callidus", or the "intriguing slave". Strobilus however, falls in the category of the 'faithful slave', who helps his master.

4.4 The Women Characters:

A study of Plautine plays shows that in all the plays available to us, there are 154 male characters, but only 54 female characters. In fact three of his plays don't have any female characters—*Captivi*, *Pseudolus* and *Trinummus*. Of course, the major reason for this is the non-availability of female actors.

The female roles were performed by men, and it was easier to give the women minor non-speaking parts. The Greeks did not have major roles for women in their plays, and since Plautus' plays were fashioned from them, he too chose to follow the same convention. Further, it can be argued that the bias Plautus shows against women is one that is a reflection of his society. In Athenian and Roman society, women were not expected to be seen in public. Their work was to take care of their household and stay within the confines of their homes. Thus, the plays do not have many women characters on the stage, and those who appear on the stage belong to the lower classes.

Staphyla:

Despite Euclio's poor treatment of her, Staphyla is a faithful servant to him and Phaedria. She is a uni-dimensional character, whose only role is that of an elderly slave. She plays an important role in the story development since she informs the audience of Phaedria's pregnant condition. Her exchanges with Euclio provide comedy and also affirm *Lar Familiaris*' description of Euclio's nature. Her speeches throw light on Euclio's character as a miserly wretch. Her speech puts Euclio in place, when she says that the house is so dirty that Dame Fortune would never set foot in it. She is an old woman, and even though she has served as Euclio's housekeeper for a long time, he does not trust her and treats her unkindly. Her presence in the play may not contribute to the action, yet her character serves to highlight the theme of the play—the futility of greed. Staphyla is sympathetic to Phaedria's condition and wants to protect her from social ostracism.

Eunomia:

Eunomia is a *matrona*, and her conversation with Megadorus presents a very stereotypical picture of women. For instance she says women often talk too much. She appears twice on stage in the course of the play. As Megadorus' sister, she shows her concern that he is not married yet, and suggests a middle-aged woman for him. It is to Eunomia that Megadorus reveals that he wishes to marry Phaedria. In her second appearance Eunomia tries to dissuade her brother from his decision as she wants her son to marry Phaedria. As with all of Plautus' *matronas*, Eunomia too is an unsympathetic figure. However, since her role as mother and sister is the one highlighted in the play, she does not appear shrewish and cunning like most *matronas*.

Phaedria:

Phaedria is a *puella*—she is the object of the young hero's affection, and it her marriage which will signal the happy ending of the play. All the actors in Plautus' time were men, and so, interestingly, Phaedria never makes an appearance on stage, even though we hear her screams during her labour. She is mentioned by the other characters. *Lar Familiaris* speaks of her devotion to him. He also apprises the audience of her seduction by Lyconides. Phaedria's future has been decided by her father in her absence. First he decided to marry her to Megadorus, and later, at Megadorus' behest, and at the return of his gold, to Lyconides. Since she cannot make any contribution to the action of the play, she doesn't appear on the stage at all. She is completely under her father's control. Her name does appear in the list of characters, so it is possible that she may have appeared at the end of the play.

Ann Raia argues that Plautus' female characters fall into five stereotypical categories—the *puella*, the *matrona*, the *meretrix*, the *ancilla* and the *anus*. The *puella* is the young maiden, who the young hero may want to seduce. The *matrona* is the married woman, the *meretrix* the courtesan, the

ancilla the handmaid and the *anus* the old woman. In *The Pot of Gold*, the three women characters all fit into a category. Staphyla is an *anus*, or old woman, the sister is the *matrona*, and Phaedria is the *puella*.

4.5 The Role of Lar Familiaris:

Lar Familiaris is the household god of Euclio's house. While the miserly Euclio does not worship Lar Familiaris, his daughter Phaedria performs the necessary ceremonies to appease the resident spirit of the house. He is the first character to come onto the stage. Since he is a God, he is not visible to the characters of the play. Lar Familiaris presents the Prologue of the play, which sets the stage for the action that follows. It is by Lar Familiaris that the audience is informed that Euclio's grandfather, being a great miser, had buried a pot of gold in the central hall of his house. This wealth had remained undiscovered until Lar Familiaris, in his pity for Euclio's impoverished condition, and his appreciation of Phaedria's devotion, guided Euclio to the treasure. As the household deity, Lar Familiaris seems to influence the action. As he announces in his Prologue, he influences Megadorus to wish to marry Phaedria. Megadorus has not married earlier, so his sudden interest in marrying Phaedria has a simple explanation here. Lar Familiaris also tells the audience in the Prologue that Phaedria has been seduced by Lyconides, Megadorus' nephew, and she is now expecting their child. Lar Familiaris initiates the plot; he introduces the theme of the play to the audience. Like 'Chorus' in Greek tragedies or 'Sutradhara' in ancient Sanskrit classical plays Lar here plays significant role.

4.6 Soliloquies:

A soliloquy is a very useful dramatic device. It is a speech by a character onstage when no other characters are present. So, the character is speaking to himself, or that he speaks his thoughts out aloud to the audience. Thus, the main aim of the soliloquy is to convey a character's intentions to the audience. Drama does not have the benefit of a narrative. While in a novel or a short story the narrative voice gives the reader an insight into a character's thoughts and motives, the actors of a play need to rely on the soliloquy to achieve the same effect. The soliloquy is thus used to explain a character's motives and actions. It can also be the means to apprise the audience of past or future events in the play.

The Pot of Gold has several soliloquies. At the beginning of the play, Euclio's soliloquy informs the audience of his intention to pretend to be poor in order to get a donation. This gives the audience an insight into Euclio's true nature. The slave too, makes a long soliloquy when he enters. His soliloquy not just acquaints the audience with his nature, but also anticipates some twists and turns in the action of the play. Megadorus' speech about dowry can also be classified as a soliloquy. Of course, in this case, the soliloquy has a listener on the stage. Unknown to Megadorus, Euclio overhears his views on dowry and decides that it would suit him to marry his daughter to Megadorus. In this way, the soliloquy helps move the action of the play forward.

4.7 The Ending:

The ending of *The Pot of Gold* is quite ambiguous and abrupt. As the ending is conjectural and is a by-product of translators' anticipation, it becomes ambiguous and even vague to some extent. In a surprise ending, Euclio gives away the pot of gold to Lyconides as a dowry for his daughter. When

Megadorus returns Euclio's pot of gold, he suggests Lyconides' marriage to Phaedria, to which Euclio readily agrees. Euclio announces that he would be happy if the money went to someone whom it could help. He realises that possessing the pot of gold has brought him nothing but misery. He did not have a moment of peace while he had the gold. He hopes he will be able to sleep restfully now that he has given it away. Though this ending is not plausible at first, since it is not consistent with Euclio's character, we have to accept it from the various surmises made by the translators and researchers.

5. Conclusion:

Plautus' continuing influence on world drama, and not just Western comic drama, can be seen in the famous playwrights that have followed him—mainly Shakespeare and Moliere. Although Shakespeare's most famous adaptation has been from *The Brothers Menaechmi*, he does draw on Plautus for his other comic plots and stock characters as well. In recent times, a musical comedy, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, is also based on Plautus.

Note: Essays written by William Harris, C. Stace and Nidhi Verma have contributed a lot in the making of this brief course module.

Resources for Further Study

1. Raia, Ann R. "*Puella, Matrona, Meretrix: Women in Roman Literature and Life*"; URL: <http://www.vroma.org/~araia/plautinewomen.html>.
2. Stace, C. "The Slaves of Plautus" in *Greece & Rome, Vol. 15, No. 1* (Apr., 1968), pp. 64-77. Cambridge University Press The Classical Association Stable; URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/642260>.

Weblinks for Further Understanding

1. Watch a wonderful performance of *Aulularia* performed by the University of Richmond's Classical Studies Department at the Luther Jenkins Greek Theater in April 1992; URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBbgfyKnJfU>.
2. Watch a literature book review of EF Watling's translation of Plautus' plays; URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ePY90PoxTI>.

Appendix

A Passage from Euclio's Miserliness to Redemption: Critiquing Plautus's *The Pot of Gold*

Dr. N. C. Saha

In the Greek New Comedy, Plautus and his audience were faced with an image of a society that in their eyes was effete, oversensitive, and refined to the point of vacuousness. But Plautus's attitude is never unpleasantly contemptuous. He approaches the whole enterprise with a spirit of joy; as he makes one of his young men say, —It's no fun being in love unless you're foolish. (Ancient Writers 505) This is a sophisticated stance, and the Roman audience was fully capable of appreciating it. Taking a cue from the most recent Plautine critics, there is wit and fun in his comedies, —and it's worth your while to attend. (Ancient Writers, 506)

E. J. Thomas begins his commentary on Plautus's *The Pot of Gold* with the observation: —*The Pot of Gold* stands alone among the comedies of Plautus as a character piece. He continues, —The character of the miser is developed in connection with a simple plot dealing with middle-class life, but it is the picture of the avaricious Euclio that gives unity to the whole. At the outset, Euclio has discovered buried in his hearth a pot of gold which his grandfather had concealed, and with it his native stinginess is enhanced into a great passion. The household deity that he is, Lar who speaks the prologue, explains that he has revealed the treasure so that Euclio may arrange a marriage proper for his daughter Phaedria, whose generosity and devotion have touched the god. We are told that this discovery was a reward for virtue — not of Euclio's but his daughter's. The god also relates the fact that the unfortunate girl has been raped by a rich young neighbour. The pot of gold, says Lar, will provide the dowry to make marriage to this young man possible. In addition, the god has arranged that the young man's uncle will ask Euclio for the girl's hand, simply to speed things up a bit.

Plautus exhibits, to quote David Konstan, —the character of the miser and the significance of his obsession as a withdrawal from social life. (309) The action of *The Pot of Gold* lays bare the difference between the miser's passion for his gold and ordinary acquisitiveness which the Romans regarded as virtue. Euclio is caught in a double bind: if he stays home with his pot of gold, he may arouse the curiosity of his neighbours. So he must engage in public life in order to keep up appearances. All of the miser's social activity is a sham, or a petition for a free bequest. Euclio wishes not to make money but to have it, and to keep it out of social circulation.

The so-called Euclio's poverty has obviously isolated him badly enough throughout his life. His discovery of the gold, which he is determined to keep a secret, isolates him even more. Euclio's desperate desire to protect his pot of gold makes him restless and suspicious of everyone around him. He suspects everyone, from his aged serving woman to strangers on the street. He is terrified to leave his house, and when he must go, he tells his servant to open the door to no one, not even Good Fortune herself. When his wealthy neighbour asks to marry his daughter, he at once concludes that his secret is out. Thanks to his isolation, Euclio continually talks to himself, and this habit is his undoing.

There is comic irony in the incident where Euclio himself facilitates the eavesdropping slave's access to the treasure. Euclio maintains a farce of poverty, even though he has become rich on finding the gold. He even attends a meeting to seek donations and projects himself as a needy old man. Euclio's assent to Megadorus' proposal for Phaedria stems from his happiness at not having to provide a dowry for her. Plautus stresses his contempt of Euclio's miserliness by giving the steward Strobilus scenes where he narrates stories about Euclio's stinginess. For instance, he suggests that if someone stole a grain of salt from Euclio, he would see it as a serious burglary. The comedy in the play arises mainly from the dramatic irony of the action. Despite Euclio's obsessive attempts to protect his pot of gold, it is stolen from him. Funnily, it is his own fault that the slave gets his hands on Euclio's treasure. Comical situations also arise from the dialogue. Witty descriptions of characters and recalling past incidents by Strobilus, Euclio and other characters add to the humour. Euclio's description of Staphyla in an early scene is demeaning no doubt, but raises much laughter in the audience. The main source of humour remains Euclio who, in his frantic attempts at preserving his gold and his suspicion of the others, is hilarious. The play is replete with instances of comic irony, when there is a gap between the dialogues and the intent of the character, and the subsequent action. For instance, the exchange between Euclio and Lyconides is a classic example of Plautus' wonderful dramatic irony. Lyconides meets Euclio, who laments the loss of his gold. Lyconides misinterprets it, and assumes that Euclio is talking about Phaedria. He then admits that he is the cause of Euclio's unhappiness, which leads to Euclio suspecting him to be the thief.

The Pot of Gold denounces Euclio's miserliness as a great vice. The love for riches is a source of anxiety. Euclio learns this lesson at the end of the play and is shown to willingly give it away to Lyconides. John Wright sums it up, —An old man, living in angry isolation, is redeemed, or at least to society, through the medium of the exuberance and innocent loves of the younger generation.(507) The extent of Euclio's conversion, or at least his return to normality, can be judged by a single line of his that happens to survive from the play's denouement: —A dozen times a night I have waked to hear a spade scratch or a lock turned. Now at last—I'm going to sleep (POG 49).

References

Konstan, David. The Social Themes in Plautus' *Aulularia*; *Arethusa* Vol. 10, No. 2 (Fall 1977), The Johns Hopkins University Press

Plautus, *The Pot of Gold*; trans. by E.F. Watling; London: Penguin Books, 1965(abbrev. as POG)

Thomas, E. J. T. *Macci Plauti Aulularia*: Oxford: 1913

Wright, John. *Ancient Writers (Greece and Rome)* ed. T. James Luce; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1982