

### **Plautus' *Aulularia* or the *Pot of Gold***

Titus Maccius Plautus (c. 254-184 B.C.) composed over 100 comedies in Latin, adapting them from Greek originals. Molière's 17th-century *L'Avare* ("The Miser") is the most famous of the later comedies inspired by the *Aulularia*.

Like all classical drama, the *Aulularia* is written in verse, and certain sections are meant to be sung by the actors. Although the characters in the *Aulularia* speak Latin, nearly everything else about them is Greek: they have Greek names, Greek clothing, and Greek customs. The action takes place on a residential street in Athens.

All of Plautus' actors were men or boys, and they wore masks. The *Aulularia* would have been performed without intermission.

The title literally means *The Little Pot*, but some translators provide the name, *The Pot of Gold*. The plot revolves around a literal pot of gold which the miserly protagonist, Euclio, guards zealously. The play's ending does not survive, though there are indications of how the plot is resolved in later summaries and a few fragments of dialogue.

Lar Familiaris, the household deity of Euclio, an old man with a marriageable daughter named Phaedria, begins the play with a prologue about how he allowed Euclio to discover a pot of gold buried in his house. Euclio is then shown almost maniacally guarding his gold from real and imagined threats. Unknown to Euclio, Phaedria is pregnant by a young man named Lyconides. Phaedria is never seen on stage, though at a key point in the play, the audience hears her painful cries in labor. Euclio is persuaded to marry his daughter to his rich neighbor, an elderly bachelor named Megadorus, who happens to be the uncle of Lyconides. This leads to much by-play involving preparations for the nuptials. Eventually Lyconides and his slave appear, and Lyconides confesses to Euclio his ravishing of Phaedria. Lyconides' slave manages to steal the now notorious pot of gold. Lyconides confronts his slave about the theft. At this point the manuscript breaks off. From surviving summaries of the play, we know that Euclio eventually recovers his pot of gold and gives it to Lyconides and Phaedria, who marry in a happy ending.

In the Penguin Classics edition of the play (Our affiliating University has prescribed this edition), E.F. Watling, the translator, devised an ending as it might have been originally, based on the summaries and a few surviving scraps of dialogue. Other writers over the centuries have also written endings for the play, with somewhat varying results.

So, let us recap the play's action. The play begins with a monologue by Euclio's household deity. He tells us that Euclio's grandfather once entrusted him with the guardianship of a pot of gold. The god has protected the secret of the pot of gold until then. He chooses to reveal the location of the treasure to Euclio for the latter's daughter, Phaedria.

The household deity tells us that Phaedria has pleased him by her devotion to him. He also reveals that Phaedria has been ravished by a gentleman of high rank. The only reason the deity has given up the location of the gold is to ensure Phaedria's marriage to Lyconides, the man who ravished her.

Meanwhile, Euclio is obsessed by his newfound pot of gold. In his paranoia, he fears that even his servant, Staphyla, will learn of its whereabouts. Meanwhile, Staphyla knows that Phaedria is pregnant, and she despairs over her mistress's fate.

We next meet Megadorus and his sister, Eunomia. The siblings talk about marriage; Eunomia wants Megadorus to marry. However, Megadorus declares that he has no use for ladies of rank with high dowries. Instead, he wants Phaedria, Euclio's daughter. Ironically, the wealthy Megadorus is also Lyconides's uncle.

Having decided on his course of action, Megadorus goes to meet Euclio to ask for Phaedria's hand in marriage. For his part, Euclio thinks that Megadorus has discovered the secret of his treasure, and he panics. Megadorus, of course, has no inkling of the treasure. He lays out his suit to Euclio, who declares that he doesn't care if Megadorus makes a match of it with Phaedria. The only thing he won't provide is a dowry.

The two agree on the terms, and Euclio tells Staphyla that Phaedria is to marry Megadorus that day. The servant is distressed to hear this, for she knows that her mistress is already carrying Lyconides' child. Meanwhile, Megadorus hires a caterer and entertainers for the wedding.

As for Euclio, he is such a miser that he only purchases some frankincense and a wreath of flowers for his daughter's wedding. As the cooks and entertainers begin arriving, however,

Euclio becomes progressively more anxious. He thinks that Megadorus has set up the cooks and servants to steal his gold. So, Euclio decides to carry his pot of gold around on his person.

Meanwhile, Megadorus is quite pleased with his match. He asks Euclio to have a drink to celebrate, but the latter refuses. Instead, Euclio makes his way to the temple of Faith and hides his pot of gold there. What he doesn't know, however, is that Strobilus (the servant of Lyconides) is spying on him for Lyconides's sake.

When Euclio leaves, Strobilus tries to look for the gold. He doesn't find it and is disappointed. Meanwhile, Euclio doubles back to check on his gold and catches Strobilus looking around the temple. He attacks Strobilus and searches him. However, he finds nothing on Strobilus and has to let the servant go. Next, Euclio hides his gold at the grove of Silvanus. This time, Strobilus manages to steal the gold from the grove.

Meanwhile, Lyconides confesses all to his mother, Eunomia. He tells her that he wishes to marry Phaedria, since it was he who violated the young woman. Eunomia agrees to help her son. For his part, Lyconides tries to reason with Euclio, who is aghast that Phaedria won't be marrying the wealthy Megadorus, after all. As for Megadorus, he renounces his claim on Phaedria.

Euclio's frustration is further compounded when he discovers that his pot of gold is gone. He blames Lyconides, who vehemently denies any knowledge of the gold. Meanwhile, Strobilus tells Lyconides what he has found. For his part, Lyconides orders Strobilus to hand the gold over. The two have an argument, but Lyconides prevails. He returns the gold to Euclio, who is so happy to get his treasure back that he agrees to the marriage between Lyconides and Phaedria. Ironically, Euclio later bequeaths the pot of the gold to the couple as a wedding gift.

### **A Comedy with elements of Satire and Farce**

The figure of the miser has been a stock character of comedy for centuries. Plautus does not spare his protagonist's various embarrassments caused by the vice, but he is relatively gentle in his satire. Euclio is eventually shown as basically a good-hearted man who has been only temporarily affected by greed for gold.

The play also ridicules the ancient bachelor Megadorus for his dream of marrying the nubile and far younger Phaedria. The silly business of preparing for the marriage provides much opportunity for satire on the laughable lust of an old man for a young woman, in a clever parallel to Euclio's lust for his gold. Again, Megadorus is eventually shown as sensible and kind-hearted enough to abandon his foolish dream.

Plautus' frequent theme of clever servants outwitting their supposed superiors finds its place in this play too. Not only does Lyconides' slave manage to filch Euclio's beloved gold, but also Euclio's housemaid Staphyla is shown as intelligent and kind in her attitude toward the unfortunately pregnant Phaedria.

So, the *Pot of Gold* is a play where the main motives are greed and gold. The theme is Euclio's greed for gold.

**The following topics may be prepared for long answers:**

1. Consider the *Pot of Gold* as a Comedy with elements of Satire and Farce.
2. Give the pen-picture of Euclio.
3. Write a note on Plautus' treatment of the servants.

**For semi-long answers, the following may be prepared:**

1. Give your idea about the problem of the manuscripts of the *Pot of Gold*.
2. Give a short note on the character of Lyconides.
3. Give a short note on the character of Megadorus.