

Plautus'
Pot of Gold

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Dramatic Plot

- “Pot of Gold” or “Aulularia” presents the theme of miserliness and the consequences that it can lead to when practiced to the extreme. In the opening scene, Plautus introduces Lar, the household deity, to explain to the audience the background of the story. Euclio’s miserly grandfather had hidden a pot of gold beneath the hearth which he discovers. Euclio has a similar personality as his grandfather and becomes excessively cautious about protecting his new-found wealth. He becomes suspicious of people around him and starts living under the constant anxiety of losing his gold. He even agrees to marry off his daughter Phaedria to the rich and old Megadorus so that he can save the dowry. Despite all his efforts, Euclio’s gold is stolen and he comes to realize that miserliness is a vice that causes agony and makes life full of apprehensions.

Dramatic Plot

- The plot is built around two primary threads: Euclio's intrigues to protect his pot of gold from suspects and thieves and Phaedria's affair with Lyconides.
- Euclio tries to act in a beggarly manner even when he is in possession of the wealth so that he can distract people and divert their attention from his pot of gold. He realized that people will become suspicious if he clings to his gold and does not make public appearances. The gold thus makes Euclio more isolated and discreet. Megadorus proposes marriage with his daughter but his interest in marrying Phaedria complicates the plot. Euclio suspects that Megadorus is after his wealth and his marriage proposal also interferes with Lyconides' desire to marry Phaedria.



Dramatic Plot

- Lyconides has illicitly impregnated Phaedria but he is also the man that she wants to get married to. It is Lyconides' slave Strobilus, who eavesdrops and comes to know about the location of the pot of gold from Euclio's soliloquy. It is thus due to Euclio's fault that Strobilus steals the gold. Lyconides recovers the gold and returns it to Euclio through Megadorus. Megadorus also suggests that Euclio should allow Lyconides to marry Phaedria to which he agrees. Euclio thus undergoes a change of heart as he realizes that his miserliness has robbed his mental peace and led to anxiety and misery.

Comic Irony

- The comic irony in the play arises from the gap between dialogues and the lapses between the action and intention of the characters. The interaction between Euclio and Lyconides, for example, gives rise to potential dramatic irony. When Euclio relates his misery upon losing his gold, Lyconides misinterprets his rant and presumes that Euclio is talking about Phaedria and her pregnancy. He admits that he is responsible for Euclio's unhappiness which leads Euclio to believe that he is confessing about his theft of gold.
- Critics have pointed out that this use of language to create a misunderstanding between the theft of virginity and the theft of wealth is an example of 'reification' where the frame of reference shifts from things, to actions, to the plot of the play.

Comic Resolution

- The resolution of the play comes in the form of Euclio offering his pot of gold to Lyconides as a dowry for his daughter. The action ends in a festive wedding scene. This ending is the most plausible resolution that the translators have deduced from the prologue and the story and we can see that the entire action revolves round the actual pot of gold. Euclio's transformation is signaled by the pronouncement that he makes at the end of the play:

“A dozen times a night I have waked to hear a spade scratch or a lock turn. Now at last—I'm going to sleep.”
- Plautus has made superb use of exaggeration, misunderstanding, coincidence and other plot devices to achieve and strengthen the comic effect.



Questions

1. Discuss the plot construction of the play “Pot of Gold”.
2. How does the action of the play create the comic effect in Plautus’ “Pot of Gold”?
3. Comment on Plautus’ use of comic irony in the “Pot of Gold”.
4. Justify the title of the play “Pot of Gold”.



Recommended Readings

1. *Nidhi Verma. Lesson: The Pot of Gold. Plautus . Maitreyi College, University of Delhi.*
2. *Dr. Nitai Chandra Saha. A Passage from Euclio's Miserliness to Redemption: Critiquing Plautus's The Pot of Gold . IJELLH Volume 6, Issue 11, November 2018.*
3. *Alex Dressler. "Plautus and the poetics of property: reification, recognition, and utopia". Materiali e discussioniper l'analisi dei testi classici. Fabrizio Serra editore. Pisa · Roma. 2016.*



Important Instructions

- I am aware that many of you were unable to procure the text of the play before the lockdown. If you need the full text of the play in the e-book format, send me a request at ppmondal@narajolerajcollege.ac.in
- You can also write to me at ppmondal@narajolerajcollege.ac.in for seeking clarification on any of the Recommended Readings.
- Send me your answers for correction and feedback at the e-mail address given above.