

Introduction to Plautus's *The Pot of Gold* (*Aulularia*)

Titus Maccius Plautus was one of the greatest comic playwrights of ancient Rome. Writing in the 3rd–2nd century BCE, Plautus adapted Greek New Comedy for Roman audiences and infused it with lively dialogue, exaggerated characters, and sharp social satire. Among his most famous plays is *Aulularia*, commonly known as *The Pot of Gold*, which remains a significant work in the history of comedy for its memorable characters and timeless theme of miserliness.

The Pot of Gold revolves around **Euclio**, an old and extremely miserly man who accidentally discovers a hidden pot of gold in his house. This discovery, instead of bringing him happiness, fills him with constant fear and suspicion. Euclio becomes obsessed with guarding his treasure and suspects everyone—his servants, neighbors, and even family members—of trying to steal it. His excessive greed and paranoia form the central comic force of the play.

Alongside Euclio's story runs a subplot involving his daughter **Phaedria**, who has been secretly seduced by **Lyconides**, a young man from a respectable family. Lyconides wishes to marry her and accept responsibility for his actions. However, Euclio remains unaware of this truth. When the wealthy but elderly **Megadorus** proposes marriage to Phaedria without asking for a dowry, Euclio agrees—not out of concern for his daughter, but because he fears losing his gold as dowry. This contrast between genuine human relationships and selfish material obsession deepens the play's moral significance.

Plautus uses **stock characters** typical of Roman comedy—the miser, the clever slave, the young lover, and the wealthy old man—but gives them energetic dialogue and dramatic immediacy. Euclio, in particular, stands out as one of the most famous misers in world literature. His character later influenced figures such as **Molière's Harpagon** in *The Miser* and even Shakespeare's comic portrayals of greed.

Although *The Pot of Gold* is technically incomplete—the original ending has been lost—the surviving text powerfully conveys Plautus's critique of greed and his belief in social harmony. The play suggests that wealth, when hoarded selfishly, leads to anxiety and isolation, while generosity and honesty restore balance.

In conclusion, *The Pot of Gold* is not merely a humorous play but a sharp social satire. Through lively comedy and exaggerated characterization, Plautus exposes human weaknesses such as greed, fear, and selfishness. Its enduring relevance lies in the fact that these flaws remain universal, making the play meaningful even for modern readers and students of English literature.