

Ques. Discuss *The Pot of Gold* as a comedy of character. Explain how Euclio's miserliness dominates the action of the play.

Ans. Plautus's *The Pot of Gold (Aulularia)* is a classic example of a **comedy of character**, where the entire dramatic action is shaped and driven by the exaggerated traits of a central figure. Unlike a comedy of situation, which depends mainly on plot complications and coincidences, a comedy of character focuses on a dominant human weakness or obsession. In *The Pot of Gold*, this dominant trait is **miserliness**, embodied in the character of **Euclio**. His extreme greed, fear, and suspicion not only define his personality but also control the movement of the plot and the behavior of other characters in the play.

Euclio is an old, poor-looking man who accidentally discovers a pot of gold hidden in his house. Instead of using this wealth to improve his life or ensure his daughter's happiness, he becomes intensely anxious and paranoid. From the moment he finds the gold, Euclio's sole concern is its safety. His miserliness is not merely love of money; it is an obsessive fear of losing it. This obsession becomes the comic centre of the play and the main source of laughter.

As a comedy of character, *The Pot of Gold* presents Euclio as an exaggerated but recognizable human type—the **miser**. Plautus exaggerates his behavior to an absurd degree. Euclio suspects everyone around him, including his loyal servant Staphyla, whom he constantly scolds and abuses. He drives her out of the house repeatedly, believing that even her presence might endanger his gold. These scenes highlight how his greed has destroyed his ability to trust or maintain normal human relationships. The humor arises from the contrast between the trivial reality and Euclio's exaggerated fear.

Euclio's miserliness dominates the **action of the play** in several important ways. First, it determines his attitude toward **marriage**. When Megadorus, a wealthy and respectable old man, proposes to marry Euclio's daughter Phaedria without demanding a dowry, Euclio readily agrees. However, his acceptance is not based on concern for his daughter's welfare but on his fear of losing money. The idea of giving a dowry terrifies him because it would require parting with his precious gold. Thus, even a major social institution like marriage is treated purely as a financial matter in Euclio's mind.

Secondly, Euclio's obsession creates constant **movement and tension** in the plot. He repeatedly changes the hiding place of the pot of gold—from his house to the temple of Faith and later to a nearby grove—because he believes it is never safe. These frantic actions provide comic scenes full of energy and suspense. Ironically, the more Euclio tries to protect his treasure, the more vulnerable it becomes, until it is finally stolen. This irony is central to the comedy and reinforces Plautus's criticism of greed.

Moreover, Euclio's miserliness overshadows the **subplot involving Phaedria and Lyconides**. Phaedria has been seduced by Lyconides and is pregnant, a serious matter that should demand parental concern. Yet Euclio remains completely ignorant of his daughter's emotional and moral crisis. His attention is so entirely fixed on his gold that he fails in his role as a father. This neglect highlights the destructive effects of miserliness and adds a moral dimension to the comedy. The audience laughs at Euclio, but also recognizes the human cost of his obsession.

Plautus further strengthens the play as a comedy of character by keeping Euclio almost **unchanged** throughout most of the drama. Unlike characters in serious drama, Euclio does not grow wiser through experience. Even when his gold is stolen, his response is not self-reflection but extreme despair, as though his very life has been taken away. This rigidity of character is a key feature of comedy of character. Euclio's personality is so fixed that every situation produces the same response—fear, suspicion, and greed.

The influence of Euclio's character extends beyond the play itself. He became the model for later misers in European literature, most notably **Harpagon in Molière's *The Miser***. This shows how successfully Plautus created a universal comic type. Euclio represents a human weakness that transcends time and culture, making the play continually relevant.

Although the original ending of *The Pot of Gold* is lost, later adaptations suggest that Euclio ultimately recovers his gold and agrees to his daughter's marriage. Even so, the central comic truth remains clear: wealth hoarded selfishly brings anxiety rather than happiness. The audience's laughter is directed not only at Euclio's foolish behavior but also at the moral lesson embedded in it.

In conclusion, *The Pot of Gold* is a fine example of a **comedy of character**, with Euclio's miserliness dominating every aspect of the play. His exaggerated greed drives the plot, shapes relationships, and generates comic situations. Through Euclio, Plautus exposes the absurdity and danger of excessive attachment to wealth. The play entertains while offering a sharp critique of human selfishness, proving that comedy can be both humorous and morally instructive.