

Greed and guffaw in
the pot of gold:
evaluate the
effectiveness of
euclio's greed...

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Greed and Guffaw in the Pot of Gold: Evaluate the effectiveness of Euclios greed for the production of laughter Aulularia, also known as The Pot of Gold, is a Latin play written during the Old Latin period. Debates about the name of the author have been going on for a long time. Currently, the three names, Titus Maccius Plautus are being used to refer to the author of this pioneering work of art about the human greed. Plautus has been famous for his comedies written by drawing inspiration from the older Greek plays in what is known as the Fabula Pallatia style (Fabula palliate 2011). Considering that “ The Pot of Gold” has a very simple plot, it might seem predictable and uninteresting. However, considering the age when this play was first written and the moral issues which have persisted across centuries, it can be viewed as an important document of human emotions (Nixon 2005).

Though he is known for his practice of borrowing most of his plots from the earlier Greek writers of the New Comedy genre, Plautus changed the settings and minor plot elements so that they portrayed the Roman way of life effectively. The Pot of Gold is one such work. In this play, he describes the changes in the life of a miser after he unexpectedly receives a pot of gold. The story revolves around Euclio and depicts his relationships with other characters such as Phaedria, the daughter of Euclio and Lyconides, the man who is in love with her in a comical way (Bates 1903).

Every one of his works exhibits interesting strategies used to evoke laughter. For instance, let us consider the use of inclusion of Roman deities in his works. In The Pot of Gold, Plautus begins the play with a narration by Lars Familiaris, the household god of Euclio, the central character of the play. Moreover, the entire play takes place before two houses where the main

characters live and the shrine of Fides. In fact, there is a scene in the play when Euclio, unable to hide the pot of gold elsewhere, hides it in the shrine of Fides which is also known as the shrine of Faith. Considering that Plautus depicts Euclio as a miser who does not trust anyone with his fortune, this comes as an irony. While he is known to follow the trodden path in selection of plots, Plautus surprises with his characters and their development in the play (Tolliver 1952).

Since we are not sure about the original work which might have inspired The Pot of Gold, we can draw an analogy between Euclio and other characters in the play. For instance, in The Pot of Gold, the household god, Lars Familiaris states that he passed the pot of gold to Euclio not due to pity on the miser but due to the devotion of his daughter. Was this an attempt to show that all greed and avarice originated from the god himself? We do not have a concrete proof to answer this question. However, the idea of god craving for some devotion from humans might have been intended to generate some laughs (Nixon 2005).

Another interesting relationship can be established between Euclio and Midas, the Greek mythological character. Both stories begin by narrating the life of the central characters since their acquisition of a powerful gift and end with the characters realizing the worthlessness of gold and relinquishing their gift. While Midas gave up his golden touch and became an ascetic, Euclio transfers the plot of gold to his daughter. This probably indicates that the greed in humans can only be suppressed but cannot be erased.

However, unlike the tale of Midas, The Pot of Gold does not try to be serious. Instead, it focuses on making the masses laugh by showing the plights of the

characters in a slapstick manner (Baldwin 1997).

Plautus never attempted to make the plot or the play realistic. Since he only wanted to create a farce which was funny enough to get the audience in splits, he played with words using puns and alliterations to generate maximum effect. This can be observed in the fast, nimble and boisterous comedy used in *The Pot of Gold*. He ends the play on a flat note with Euclio exclaiming, " I used to be digging ten ditches a day. I never had a bit of rest day or night watching it: now I shall sleep." However, it does not reduce the comical effect created by the rest of the play. Our observations are only capable of reflecting the perceptions of the present age. In order to correctly interpret art or understand the intentions of the artist, we need to understand the social, political and artistic norms of the age when it was created. Since we do not have access to this information, we can only conclude saying that Plautine literature was immensely successful in his time. His use of stock characters such as the desperate old man and the witty slave has been copied by numerous authors but his style of humor remains unique and inimitable (Stock Character, 2011). His contribution to the genre of comedy can be summarized using the epitaph on his grave: " Deserted is the stage; then Laughter, Jest and Wit" (Morris, 1831).

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