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Plautus: *Pot of Gold*

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Aulularia is a Roman/ Latin play written by the early Roman playwright **Titus Maccius Plautus**. *Aulularia* means *The Little Pot* but the play has usually been translated into English as *The Pot of Gold*.

Having studied the Greek Epic – *Homer's Iliad*; and the Greek Tragedy – **Sophocles's** *Oedipus Rex/ Oedipus the King*; in the first two blocks of this course, we will now delve into a little 'Roman Holiday' and look at Roman Comedy in this block and the *Satires* of **Horace** and the *Metamorphoses* of **Ovid** which fits into the genres of narrative poetry, the epic/ the elegy/ the tragedy and the pastoral in the next block. You are expected to read *Pot of Gold* tr. E. F. Watting (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965).



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UNIT 1 ROMAN COMEDY

Structure

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this unit are to acquaint us with the origins of the comic genre and help enquire into the nature of comedy. It will also help us understand the beginnings of Roman comedy from its Greek antecedents. Finally, the unit will enable us to analyse the different aspects of Roman comedy. The last part will briefly enumerate the closing of the theatres and the end of classical drama.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this section, we shall look at what a comedy is. A comedy is a play that employs the comic mode to present a drama/ dramatic moment. A central marker of this is the generation of laughter—in this sense a primary product of a comic play. These arise out of social contradictions that remain unresolved and create laughter. The final ending is generally a happy one that will pacify all anxieties raised in the course of the play. This resolution will then have a kind of humanising impact on the audience—the follies and foibles of day-to-day life as seen through the lens of comic drama would make them accept and understand the faults and shortcomings of human nature. In short, the comic manner helps to accept distorted portraits of human nature rather than strive for a superficial idea of perfection. The contradictions in society vary from one historical period to another. This also means that the mode of laughter can also be constructed historically. In this context, let us take a look at the beginnings of comic drama to understand the context of Roman comedy and the position of the Roman playwright known as **Titus Maccius Plautus** (254-185 BC).

1.2 ORIGINS OF ROMAN COMEDY

Comic drama took off from the Greek dramas of Old Comedy viz-a-viz **Aristophanes** and the “New Comedy” of **Menander**, **Diphilus** and **Philemon**. Roman comedy related more to the New Comedy of Greece as compared to the structure of Old Comedy. One must keep in mind that Old Comedy grew out of various informal performance modes such as gymnastics, acrobatics

and so on. These went on to give rise to a form of drama where the Chorus became an integral part of the play. The characters commented on social situations and dealt with them leading to a kind of comic resolution. The origins of Greek Comedy will be discussed briefly next.

1.2.1 Greek Comedy – Origins

So Greek comedy as we understand it today, probably emerged from physical performances later blended with dramatic situations. A sense of music, dance combined with a specific social situation led to the creation of a more formalised sense of drama. As **Hugh Denard** points out in “Lost Theatre and Performance traditions in Greece and Italy”:

Alongside these more or less ‘theatrical’ traditions were a host of other performance activities by musicians, maskers, magicians, dancers, jugglers, poetry performers, exhibition speakers, tightrope walkers (in all shapes and sizes), sword-swallowers, storytellers, engineers, acrobats, escapologists, performing animals and others. Paratheatrical performances like these were to be found in the most unexpected places: at funerals, processions, dinner parties, in schools, on the streets, in front of temples, in the marketplace, in the countryside, at horse-races, at athletic and gladiatorial contests as well as on the stage itself; performance was a particularly flexible form of currency in the unceasing transactions of cultural change.
(McDonald 139)

Moreover, war with Sparta and submission to it formed the political backdrop of plays by playwrights such as **Aristophanes**. Sparta represented organised military might and this caught the attention of the Athenian mind. These factors governed the emergence of Old Comedy. The focus of **Aristophanes**, a major proponent of this style, remained on Athenian life and the democratic world of the citizen. In short the social, political and cultural life of Athens. It was so specific to its context that it lost appeal and gradually gave way to the New Comedy that was seen as more liberating despite its narrow focus.

1.2.2 New Greek Comedy

With **Menander**, as the shift to New Comedy took place, the emphasis changed and plays presented stock plots and the life of the citizen. For, in New Comedy, the plots were most stereotypical focussing on ideas such as mistaken identity. But the issues in the play were closer home to the audience in Rome. The “realism” **Panayotakis** mentions is one that deals with the immediate social structure of the people watching the play. The humour, slap-stick or the bawdy was also something that viewers could understand. The plays of this new style focussed on the city. **Eric Segal** sums this up aptly:

*As we look back at Classical Greek literature, we can perceive two distinct types of comedy. First, there were the wild, loosely structured, bawdy, lyrical-satirical choral extravaganzas, whose most famous—but by no means only practitioner was **Aristophanes** (c. 448-380 BC)...For various and complex reasons, however, the genre did not survive the fall of Athens in the Peloponnesian War (404 BC). The so-called New Comedy that even then was starting to evolve was radically different: typical (in plot and characterisation), atypical,*

polite and atypical. It had neither chorus, nor songs nor jokes as such. New Comedy presented stock characters in stock situations. Its locale was the city, its people the bourgeoisie, its plots romantic: boy meets/ wants/ has previously raped girl. The whole play milieu was at once realistic and yet removed from reality. (Segal xii-xiii)

In Greece then, there was a shift from a Chorus heavy play to one which focussed more on a kind of narrative characterisation. The focus of New comedy on the city and the emerging group **Segal** has termed the *bourgeoisie* would have suited the interest of the Romans. The chief playwright who lends his own to New Comedy was **Menander** (342-293 BC). Fragments of his plays and full-fledged ones such as *The Grouch* and *The Girl From Samos* have been discovered. Meanwhile, the rise of Rome in terms of political power would have created a sense of prosperity and the formation of a social group that was somewhat like the *bourgeoisie*. Further a sense of political stability gave people the leisure to experiment with these cultural forms that they discovered through their interactions with Greek forms. One can see the connections between Greek comedy and the consequent developments in Rome. But these need to be analysed as innovations or a reworking of the Greek form taken on by the Romans. The playwrights did not simply emulate the inherited structure, but they also added their own respective flavour to it. Moreover, to imagine Greek identity as monolithic and holistic would be a misplaced conception. Critics have pointed out that to be Greek meant a composite entity. The performing traditions of Greek classical drama partook from other styles in the East. This clearly meant that in taking on from other Eastern trends, it created a more complex unit, what we understand today as Greek drama. Gradually, the presence of a few actors and the Chorus in a Greek play gave way to a construct that included more characters. The organisation of competitive events made the actor an important person and prizes were given to the actor. Soon after actors guilds were formed. Therefore, the emergence of Greek drama is connected to the creation of the actor as a specific professional unit. From Greece, it's time to move to Rome and look at both the rise of the Roman Empire as well as the rise of the Comic Mode in Latin Literature.

1.2.3 Rise of the Roman Empire and the Comic Mode

By the 3rd century BC, Rome had become a power to reckon with. It had conquered all of Italy and Greece and had defeated Carthage in the Carthaginian wars. In Rome, the deficit of a cultural solidity of the Greek sort was felt and the rise of drama and other activities flowered in this period that followed. Sicily was conquered and an interaction with the country brought in the idea of culture. As **Segal** points out,

“With Sicily’s wealth and strategic position came an extra benefit, culture. From at least the sixth century BC, it had been a highly civilised island where all the arts had flourished, especially drama. In Sicily, for the very first time, the Romans saw theatres”
(Segal xii)

An interaction with another culturally advanced state led to this reorientation in the case of the Romans. They would certainly have felt a kind of cultural deficit. But the Romans were able to adopt the forms of drama in Greece and adapt them to their own context. The emergence of Roman drama as a separate construct can therefore be attributed to these factors. This transition was apt

keeping in mind the political ascendancy of the Roman Empire. As **George E Duckworth** states:

In the third century B.C. they came into closer contact with the Greeks of Southern Italy and Sicily and realised how inadequate had been their own personal growth. At the close of the First Punic War there came a demand for better education and amusement; this provided the necessary stimulus to literature, and it was but natural that the Romans turned to the fully developed Greek epic and drama as models. (xii)

The interaction of the Romans with the Greeks of Southern Italy provided a new impetus to culture. The Roman tradition in its formative stages was also influenced by many such as the **Etruscan, Umbrians** and so on. **Duckworth** records how the historian **Livy** describes the various stages of the development of drama in Rome. Some of these are:

- Etruscan dance to flute during the plague in 364 B.C.
- This dance was combined with gesture and dialogue and was close to the *Fescennine verses*
- A music medley known as the *saturna* followed. It lacked concrete plot
- Plays with a sense of plot (**Duckworth** mentions how **Livy** does not state that these were Greek plays adapted for the Roman stage).
- Coming up of the professional actors for proper plays. The amateurs continued to engage with song and jest

Looking at this sequence of plausible events it is clear that in Rome, drama emerged as a result of certain interactions with the Greeks. The cultural collusion with Greek literature led to the transformation of these plays on the Roman stage. It can also be seen that drama was formed from a combination of music and dance. The Etruscan dance, *Fescennine verses*, and a musical medley led to the creation of a sense of plot. This might have been nascent to begin with, but the watching of full-fledged Greek plays by the Romans would have given them new ideas to understand their own world in relation to the stage. Moreover, social situations such as the plague too involved performances where an effort to placate the gods was made. So at times a wedding, at other times a game or a funeral became an occasion to perform. The reasons ranged from entertainment to appeasing the gods. In all this the form of the Greek New Comedy came in handy. The formation of professional actors guilds then helped establish a unique style of Roman drama, a confluence of the Greek and its own early sporadic traditions of farce, gymnastics, acrobatics and so on.

1.2.4 Indigenous Performing Traditions of Italy

In terms of Italy's own performance traditions, there existed the farce, slapstick humour, jest; mostly all imbued with obscenity. These forms continued along with the developments into the more solid ones of comedy and tragedy. Two concrete indigenous forms were the *Fabula Atellanæ* and the *Fescennine Verses*. The former was a significant form of comic drama in the popular style started by the **Oscans** from Atella, a town between Campania and Latium. According to **Mark Griffith** in "‘Telling the Tale’: A Performing Tradition from Homer to Pantomime”:

[It was] a form of improvised farce (*fabulae Atellanae*, 'Atellan stories/plays'), employing masks, stock characters and conventional plots, which also allowed room for some audience involvement too. These stock figures (Pappus the father/old geezer; Bucco the braggart, Dossen(n)us the trickster; Maccus the clown and Manducus the Ogre) show up in more or less recognized form in many Plautine comedies, and an ancient (and not incredible) biographical tradition asserted that T. Maccius Plautus was so named because of his early success as a professional Atellan 'clown' before he came to Rome. As for comedy, the 'Old' Comedy of Aristophanes and his contemporaries was no longer performed (too topical, too wild and crazy, too scurrilous and gross), though some of those plays were still read in schools as examples of fifth-century Attic conversational style. In the theatres, it was the more allegorized and mythological dramas of Middle Comedy (including Aristophanes' late *Wealth*), or the intricate social-romantic comedies of Menander and the other 'New' Comedians that were chiefly performed. (McDonald 27-28)

The *Atellan Farces* used the **Oscan** dialect. The farce with its use of masks and a possible engagement with the audience, led to a more concrete form that acted upon the existing plot style to create a specific form. The presence of stock characters such as the clown or the braggart meant that the playwright took recourse to the acceptable forms. However, within this there was ample scope to rework social situations in a way that the audience could laugh and therefore, engage with. These stock forms appear in the comedies of **Plautus**. So, one can see the connection between **Plautus**'s style and the native traditions of the farce. Another aspect that can be foreground is that the use of humour and slapstick or even the bawdy remained an integral part of this cultural form. *Fescennine Verse* also needs to be looked at next.

1.2.5 Fescennine Verses

Fescennine Verses were attributed to the town of Etruria. These were a form of "improvised comic disparagement" (McDonald 143). Generally performed at celebratory events such as weddings in the popular rural set-up, they combined laughter with a social situation or to "avert evil spirits who might otherwise blight crops, or male sexual performance" (143). There were also the "exotic dance of the *Salii* ('Leaping Priests') and the eerie aristocratic funeral ceremonies at which masks of the ancestors (*imagines*) were paraded around on sticks as the glorious achievements of the family were narrated (29). The verses then combined popularly held beliefs regarding the spirits along with making fun or mocking at the social situations. The performance of these verses at weddings and funerals, an idea typical to the Greek and Roman drama is interesting. The two in a sense cover a wide range of the spectrum making one understand that drama was an integral part of each social situation.

Along with these two forms there was also the *mime* that was popular in the local imagination. The Latin *mime* was also rather sketchy and had no fixed form, maybe a rude combination of *mime*, gesture and music. **George Duckworth** is quick to point out that even these forms were probably influenced by the Greek ones as *mime* too existed in Sicily and southern Italy. In fact it is also believed that the Greek *Phylax* may have influenced the *Fabula Atellana*. One can see therefore, the impact of the *Fabula Atellana* and the

Fescennine Verses on the development of Roman comedy. Combined with the “New Comedy” from Greece, we end up with an interesting composite of the comic mode in Rome especially in the hands of *Plautus* and *Terence*. Having traced the background to Roman Comedy in relatively detail, we shall now look at the beginnings of Roman Drama.

1.3 LIVIUS ANDRONICUS AND THE BEGINNING OF ROMAN DRAMA

Drama in Greece was part of the festival called the “*City Dionysia*” in Athens. According to **Fritz Graf** in “Religion and Drama,”

“The introductory rites of the festival—the introduction of the image and the procession to the theatre—expressed the alterity that entered the city with Dionysus: the god arrived from the margins of the Athenian territory. Drunken revelry was another expression of alterity, as was the presentation of unrestrained male sexuality in the phallic procession”
(McDonald 56)

In Athens then music, dance and a kind of dramatic element was part of the *Dionysian* festival which has been termed as a celebration of alterity. In a sense the hidden desires and drives of the people would then be expressed during this festival. It’s essentially male and phallic drive remains central to this occasion. *Dionysus* himself is seen as a “military leader” whose exploits remain central to this celebration.

In contrast, festivals in Rome were not really accompanied by the dramatic elements. The credit for making the dramatic element a part of the festivals goes to **Livius Andronicus**. He is believed to have put up the first dramatic performances. It is believed that drama in Rome was not as close to religion as was the case with Greece. **Graf** points out how the playwright **Terence** complained that his comic actors had to compete with “*boxers, tightrope walkers, and gladiators*”.

The beginnings of Roman drama have been attributed to **Livius Andronicus**. He is believed to have been a Greek slave. There is also the conjecture that he was an actor in the family of **Marcus Livius Salinator**. He is supposed to have adapted both a Greek tragedy and comedy in Latin for the Roman stage. It is believed that in 364 BC when Rome was hit by the plague, a “*lectisternium*” or banquet for gods was performed to appease the Gods. Then the **Etruscan** dancers were called and that is when the dramatic element was introduced. Whereas for the tragedies or *Fabula Crepidata* the Romans went back to the high phase of Greek tragedy, the fifth century B.C. and modelled their plays on those of the Greek masters—**Aeschylus**, **Sophocles** and **Euripides**. In the case of the comic mode, *Fabula Palliata*, the playwrights of Rome did not revert to that high phase of **Aristophanes** but to the more recent category of New Comedy. The importance given to the Chorus morphed into the “choral interludes”. There was something about these plays of the third century B C that appealed to the citizens of Rome. New Comedy focussed on notions of the family. This meant that social contradictions shifted focus from the society to the family. Within it the focus was on the young lover or the issue of mistaken identity. This as many critics have pointed out was both the

strength and the drawback of New Comedy. **Costas Panayotakis** in “Comedy, Atellane Farce and Mime” explains this transition from the old to the new style of comedy thus:

Greek New Comedy was a type of five-act drama cultivated mainly after the death of Alexander the Great (323 BC); although it shared structural and thematic motifs with earlier periods of Greek comedy, it differed from them in its chorus, which was apparently used for musical interludes only, the stock characters who were presented as members of a family rather than of the polis, the subject matter which was drawn usually from the lives of fictional prosperous Athenians, the rarity of long musically accompanied songs, the apparent lack of obscene jokes and explicit political comments, and the greater tendency toward realism, which was exemplified through language, costumes, masks and theatrical conventions such as the unity of time and space – itself associated with a major change in the architectural space in which these plays were performed. The audience’s superior knowledge, acquired through the expository prologues uttered by omniscient deities, the emphasis on character-portrayal by means of lengthy soliloquies, and the multiple levels on which a character’s words operated indicate that New Comedy was a sophisticated means of entertainment, required an attentive audience and had a moral agenda in the guise of troubled human relationships ending happily.
(Harrison 131-132)

This provided a trope that was employed by the Romans in the comic mode. The shift in the comic style also meant that the actor as an entity became increasingly important and were perceived in different ways in the many time periods under study. The popularity of **Plautus’** plays can be seen through the process of repetition of a play. It indicates the importance of theatre in the lives of the common people. According to **Graf**:

*Nevertheless, the public performance of drama in Republican Rome never moved away from the state festivals and their religious institutions. When the public wanted a popular piece repeated, the only way to do so was to repeat the entire festival through the mechanism of instauratio, the repetition of a ritual because of a formal flaw. It cannot be a coincidence that during **Plautus’** lifetime the ludi Romani were repeated more often than at any time before or after. The most memorable instauratio happened in the year 205 BC, when **Plautus** staged his wildly successful *Miles Gloriosus* (The Swaggering Soldier): the ludi had to be performed seven times, more because of the poet’s genius than the incompetence of Rome’s sacred officials.*
(McDonald 57)

The *instauratio* indicated the interest in the specific form. Theatre also provided a means of entertainment and broadly enjoyed the stock characters as they saw them in their real lives. **Plautus’** plays certainly contributed towards these developments meaningfully. We have divided the remaining portion of this unit into Roman Theatre during the ancient period, indigenous Roman traditions and the end of Classical Drama, so we have a complete bird’s eye-view of Roman Comedy. We shall look at Roman Theatre during the ancient period next.

1.4 ROMAN THEATRE DURING THE ANCIENT PERIOD

There were no permanent stage structures during **Plautus'** time. The first permanent stone theatre was built by **Pompey** in 60 BC. It meant that during **Plautus'** time the stage was a temporary structure generally wooden. It was called a *scaena* or a *proscenium*. It was visualised as a “city street” with the doors of two to three houses opening into the street. The stage would then have been long and narrow. This meant that the stage did not have the kind of depth we see on a *proscenium* stage now-a-days. The audience would have been able to visualise the scene in terms of people meeting on the streets or back alleys. The slave running from one house to another was quite a common feature in these plays. In fact plays that often centred on the idea of mistaken identity such as **Plautus'** *The Brothers Menaechmi* could be performed with ease on a narrow stage with doors opening out into the street. A constant movement could well be possible.

In *Pot of Gold*, *Euclio* running in and out of the house, the slaves being thrown out of the miser's house and into the street or their movement back to *Megadorus'* house—movement of this sort would have been easily facilitated by this kind of stage. The same can be said of the audience. It is plausible that the audience too was made to sit on wooden platforms. This must have lent a kind of informal air more akin to laughter and obscenity. Senators and other important people could have occupied separate spaces even as the composition of the audience was largely “*heterogeneous*”. The female parts were performed by the men. However **Segal** points out that this could be speculation as it is known that women did act in “*coarse mimes*”. He also conjectures that due to the impact of New Comedy and Atellan farces the actors could have been masked. With the establishment of the permanent stone theatre, and a certain formalism at the level of performance can be imagined. **Plautus** and **Terence** remain the masters of Roman comedy while **Seneca** was the king of the Roman tragedy. We have mentioned that Roman Comedy grew out of New Greek Comedy, but every culture also adds its own distinctive characteristics. Let us examine indigenous Roman traditions in next section.

1.5 INDIGENOUS ROMAN TRADITIONS

Roman Games

The *Ludi Romani* or the Roman Games became a platform to provide for the performance of the acrobats, jugglers, dancers, gymnasts and so on. As **Denard** points out that at the end of the third century BC, the *Ludi Florales* was added. Gradually, these festivals provided space for the performance of plays. Two noteworthy points we take from this are that the festivals were the initial platform for the performance of the plays. This meant that there was an inherent celebratory tone to them which would have certainly worked in the case of the comedies. Further, the festivals entailed a performance that was part of the community space. Social participation would then be an integral part of the event. Followed by the emergence of the city in the context of Rome's

rising power, these festivals drew attention from other parts of the world and encouraged the actors to perform. According to **Mark Griffith**,

By the third century BC, the city had expanded enormously both in its range of cultural contacts and in the size and diversity of its population, and henceforth it was to serve (even more than Athens had done for the Greek world of the fifth century) as a magnet for enterprising artists in all genres from all over the Mediterranean and as the prime market for the latest and most sophisticated cultural forms (though one should not ignore the cultural life of other Italian cities, such as Naples and Tarentum). Educated and widely travelled Roman elites were by now becoming more and more fixated on Greek culture as the acme of sophistication, and were attempting to acquire or emulate it in every way possible. It is during this period that the first examples of a distinctive 'Roman' theatre (plays written and performed in Latin) are attested, and from the first these comprised an adventurous blend of indigenous (Italian) and imported (mainly Greek) elements. (McDonald 29-30)

It is an interesting contradiction that it is the urge to acquire culture and sophistication that brings in drama to Rome. But at the same time, its use of the *bawdy* and the *buslesque* made it a liberating medium that led to a reorientation of established hierarchies in the play. In the rise of Roman drama from its Greek counterparts one can see a distinct cultural formation that emerges out of the processes well rooted in society. So the fusion of forms that are brought in from a developed Greek context, acquire new meaning in the formation of the city and the rise of the Roman Empire. This alliance with the city was particularly interesting as it allowed for a broader and in a sense newer presentation and discussion of social characters. Therefore, the emergence of the city can well be associated with a comic style in which the slaves along with their masters could be seen in important roles. This was particularly so in the hands of **Plautus**. According to **Rush Rehm** in "Festivals and Audiences in Athens and Rome":

The Saturnalia festival featured various status and role reversals involving slaves and their masters, and the Roman palliata developed this motif. Plautine comedy abounds in slaves who outwit their masters, manifesting their intelligence and inventiveness at the expense of aristocrats, soldiers, tradesmen and citizens of all sorts. (McDonald 195)

A kind of role reversal in the play must have been liberating for the slaves and the ensuing laughter would have allowed the audience to view the slaves too as complete characters, independent and not simply attached to their masters. This is why Roman theatre has been associated with a kind of alterity; one that subverted the prevailing value system. Society in Rome was "governed by a series of restrictive, moral ordinances" (Segal xviii). These were related to hierarchies and remained a central aspect of day-to-day life. All this is subverted within the gamut of the Roman comedy especially through the figure of the slave. Alterity, therefore, functions in relation to a kind of social performance that undermined a certain value system. The buffoon, the slave

or other comic characters on stage would have allowed for laughter and a mixing/reversal of the master-slave relationship. This would have made the audience momentarily forget the social positioning of the slave and allowed them to look at this figure in a more humane manner. But just as every literary movement a historical period, rises, reaches its peak and collapses similarly the end of high classical drama too was near. The next section will examine the reasons that lead to the decline/end of Classical Drama as we know it.

1.6 END OF CLASSICAL DRAMA

The advent of Christianity led to a questioning of the forms of performance. The “*religious burlesque*” continued their focus on the Roman gods who held centre stage for them. This would have undermined the growing popularity of the Christian idea. In this context as **Denard** points out that both the *mime* and *pantomime* continued this and finally came under severe attack.

As its secular power grew, the Church exploited a long tradition of Roman antitheatricalism and moral conservatism to encourage sanctions against the theatre, at the same time threatening his own followers with excommunication for theatrical attendance. By combining secular and sacred power, the Church finally succeeded in using the perceived ‘immorality’ of the Roman mime to discredit and destroy the great and ancient institution of the theatre, although it took some time: mimes were still being banned in 692 AD.
(McDonald 159)

The charge of “immorality” on the Roman theatre continued along with its proliferation in community life. Subversion remained an integral part of drama in Rome. People getting together to watch the plays and participate in them, may have disturbed the dominant factions leading to the banning of theatres in Rome. This puritanical strain, variously under attack in the Roman comedy finally combined with a kind of conservatism practised by the church. The most obvious outcome as this attack on comedy became more pronounced with the banning of the theatres. Theatres were shut down by **Justinian** in 526 AD. **Griffith** points out that even though the theatres had been banned by **Justinian**, performances continued to take place in some form. It is only in 692 AD when the **Byzantine** administration was defeated by the **Lombards** and the **Trullan** council banned all in 692 AD that classical drama came to an end.

1.7 LET US SUM UP

This unit acquaints us with the origins of drama in Rome. On the one hand are its connections with Greek drama especially New Comedy, on the other are the native performing traditions in Italy. These range from acrobats to *Atellan farces* and *Fescennine Verses*. These trends closer home combined with the impact of the New Comedy gave, the Romans their sense of culture through drama. The element of humour and farce remained significant framing elements that allowed for *lewd* jokes and the *bawdy* to occupy an important space in Roman comedy of **Plautus** and **Terence**. We will also be able to understand the subversive elements present in the Roman drama especially with Plautine comedy and its emphasis on the slave. These would have ruffled the complacency of the powerful factions. This factor coupled with the increase in prominence

of the church finally led to the closing of the theatres and brought to end the period of classical drama.

1.8 QUESTIONS

1. Explain the connections between Greek drama and the development of theatre in Rome.
 2. Discuss the native Italian traditions and their impact on Roman comedy.
 3. What do you think was the importance of physical performances in the Roman comic genre?
 4. What do you understand by New Comedy? Analyse its connections with the emergence of drama in Rome.
 5. Write a brief note on the closing of the theatres and the end of classical drama.
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1.9 GLOSSARY

Classical Drama : The surviving Greek texts of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes and Menander, and the Latin texts of Seneca, Plautus and Terence, comprise a body of ‘classical’ drama that has long been recognized as canonical and that sometimes feels almost inevitable. (McDonald 13)

fabula crepidata : tragedies

fabula palliate : comedies

Phylax : Buffoon play

Farce : A dramatic work that makes use of the bawdy. It makes use of exaggeration and the characters are often stereotypical.

Subversion : to challenge and undermine strong prevailing beliefs.

Old Comedy : It was loose in terms of structure and the chorus was an integral part of this kind of comedy. Aristophanes’ *The Birds* is an example.

New Comedy : Greek comedy has been divided into Old, Middle and New comedy. The comedies of Aristophanes are considered as Old Comedy. Fragments of Middle comedy are available. New Comedy has been attributed to the plays of Menander.

UNIT 2 POT OF GOLD-I

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Prologue
- 2.3 Euclio and the Slaves
- 2.4 The Marriage Proposal: Implications
- 2.5 The Slave Pageant
- 2.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.7 Glossary
- 2.8 Questions

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will acquaint us with a brief summary and introduce important themes in the first half of the play *Pot of Gold*. Some of these are the speech of *Lar Familiaris*, *Euclio* as miser, *Megadorus*'s marriage proposal for *Euclio*'s daughter, *Phaedria* and the slave pageant. The focus will remain on the use of language to build *Euclio*'s character as a miser and the implications of *Megadorus*'s marriage proposal. There will also be a discussion of stage space given to the slaves in the play.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Aulularia or *Pot of Gold* like most other Roman Comedies falls within the tradition of the *fabula palliata*. These were Roman adaptations of the Greek originals. In the hands of **Plautus** these underwent significant changes as the stock characters from Greek plays were placed in a Roman setting. The issues taken up, the social setting and the humour was akin to the world of the Roman audience. As suggested in the previous unit, **Plautus** and **Terence** reworked the Greek plays but instead of the style of the Old Comedy they responded to the idea of New Comedy. According to **Costas Panayotakis** in "Comedy, Atellane Farce and Mime"

[Plautus] makes his Greek characters allude to Roman customs, stresses the motif of treachery and deceit, sacrifices subtlety of character-portrayal to amusingly violent images of verbal and visual humour, and (most importantly) gives a new dimension to the character of the cunning slave, who dominates the action and becomes not only the hero of the play but also the poet's alter ego. 'Plautopolis' (as Gratwick 1982 happily called it) is a topsy-turvy world, in which everything is possible (Harrison 135-136)

Pot of Gold is a continuous play without division into acts or scenes. The action of the play takes place on a street in Athens. This might have suited the structure of the stage generally seen as lengthwise. According to stage instructions, the two houses are separated by a shrine dedicated to *Fides* representing Trust; a quality that is subject to suspicion by the miser at every point in the play. The two important characters mentioned at the beginning are *Euclio* and *Megadorus*. There is an altar opposite the rich man's house. The

right and left of the stage have been described in terms of the spectators. Instead of presenting it as a separate section, the playwright provides an instruction stating that the *Lar Familiaris* goes downstage to deliver the *Prologue*. Let's move ahead and see what the *Prologue* deals with. We hope you have read the play by now, if you haven't please read the play before you proceed further.

2.2 PROLOGUE

We are well aware that the plays of **Plautus** and **Terence** were a reworking of their Greek originals. However, as most critics have pointed out, the Roman audience would not have been familiar with the original text. Further, where the Greek plays made sharp comments on specific political situations/ figures, in keeping with the developments of New Comedy, the Roman plays took on from these writers but they reworked them in more generalised terms in the context of Rome. The construction of humour then was more in keeping with their own immediate Roman setting.

The play begins with a speech by *Lar Familiaris*, or the household god. This is akin to the idea of a *Prologue* in Greek Comedy. In it, he presents himself in terms of his function as the guardian spirit of the house. *Lar Familiaris* also gives an outline of the events that are to take place. In a sense the plot is presented to the audience even before the play has started. The *Prologue*, an idea that continued from the Greek plays, determines the course of events and dispels any suspense regarding the play. The audience is kept informed about what will follow. In this regard, **Warren S Smith** states:

Plautus and Terence camouflage their Roman satiric targets under foreign and exotic names and give the plays foreign settings, although both Roman playwrights often use a prologus (speaker of a prologue) to address the audience and often refer to the playwright himself in the third person—while calling for silence, providing a plot summary, or expressing the relationship between the play at hand and its Greek model or models. (2)

Lar Familiaris is the patron god of the family, and has been protecting the pot of gold for years. He shares information with the audience. The “grandad” had given him a pot of gold which he has buried in the “hearth”. As the household god he is asked to protect the gold. The old man is a miser and refuses to part with this information. As a result, the son remains ignorant of this wealth and continues to live in penury. Eventually, the son is left with a small piece of land. In this way, the household god becomes a character in his own right as he begins to observe the granddad’s son. Once again, as he does not receive the desired attention from the son, *Lar Familiaris* withholds information about the gold. This decline in attention to the household god increases with the next generation. However, the silver lining turns out to be *Euclio*’s daughter. She gives due respect to *Lar Familiaris*. It is for her sake that the protector lets the father discover the gold to ensure a good marriage for the young girl. The Prologue therefore, presents a history of this lineage where gold is passed on without the knowledge of the family. The course of event begins from this point onwards as *Lar* shares information with the audience. *Euclio*’s daughter, *Phaedria* has been “ravished” or has been physically exploited by an upper-class young man. And the *Lar* has a plan to set things right. He intends to get the neighbour to ask for the girl’s hand as it is his nephew who

has ravished the girl. In this way, *Lar Familiaris* is the protagonist who manipulates the events. According to **Alison Sharrock**:

A share in the divine perspective is offered to us also by Aulularia, introduced by the Lar Familiaris who knows everything and has organised everything. This character is a great teller of stories, especially those where he is the hero. Again the level of storytelling is far greater than the requirements of the plot, and serves both to entertain the audience and also to create the greater world of the imagination. The Lar launches straight into his story, starting with its main character, himself.... The Lar thus has the opportunity to display his own ideas, and to use the ancient god's prerogative of aiding only those who honour him. (35)

Sharrock aptly calls him the “trickster”. Through his machinations, the resolution of the play is already laid out. The critic, **David Konstan** in the essay “Social Themes in *Aulularia*” comments that the *Prologue* presents the two overarching themes in the play—“the theme ... the theme of avarice and the romantic theme” (309). The comic tone is ensured as the protector intends to set things right for the devout girl. It is interesting to mark the pointed association of class with this misuse of women. It appears that the exploitation of the woman from the lower class by upper class males is a common phenomenon. The conflict and its resolution is presented right at the beginning. In fact most plays of the New Comedy dealt with realistic situations and the “ravished” woman, the miser and the young lover were common figures in Roman Comedy. Take a look at these lines spoken by the *Lar Familiaris*:

*Should any wonder who I am, I'll make it brief:
A household guy am I (indicating Euclio's house)—and here from
whence I came,
The family I have now protected for year...
He left behind a son, the one who lives here now,
And he's as bad as dad and grandad were before,
And yet his only daughter daily worships me.
She always brings me offerings of wine and incense
And garlands too. It's for this young girl's sake
I saw to it that Euclio unearthed the treasure.
To help him marry off his daughter, if he wished.
[Confidentially] An upper-class man has ravished her.
The lad knows whom he's ravished, though she knows him not.
Nor does her father know she's been ravished.
Today I'll see to it the codger from next door
Will ask to marry her. Now here's my plan
To make it easier for him who ravished her
To get to marry her. Because as it turns out
Our neighbour is the Uncle of the youth who wronged her
At the midnight revels of the Ceres festival (1-3; 22-36)*

Lar Familiaris's speech establishes a relationship with *Euclio*'s ancestors. As guardian, he has to ensure that things take a happy turn. One must note that marriage remained central to the society of the times. This social institution was entwined with the idea of money. Let us analyse its workings both in the case of *Euclio* and the rich neighbour as prospective groom. But, festivals in this period had a subversive role to perform. Performances, especially the comedies

could challenge entrenched ideas and create space for a re-think in the society. Opportunities such as the “*midnight revels of the Ceres festival*” upturned social norms and became a site of uninhibited interaction between the men and the women. This was used as a common ploy in the plays of the time.

If we take a look at the next set of stage instructions, we will get an insight into the social structure of the time—

The door flies open and Euclio the miser emerges angrily, swinging a club at his ancient female servant. He is filthy wearing tattered garments. (190)

These lines reveal the society of the times and the psychological makeup of *Euclio*. It is clear that there were masters and slaves in Rome at the time. The masters had complete right over their slaves who were supposed to move puppet-like and execute orders. In the world of **Plautine** drama, however, all this is subverted. Where *Euclio* has a right to swing a club at the female servant, she too has a mind of her own and resents this behaviour. She wonders as to what is going on with the master. In plays such as *The Brothers Menaechmus*, the slaves think, perform, act of their own will and therefore, become an integral part of the plot. In fact they contribute in a big way to the confusion in the course of events. It is indeed creditable that a class of people relegated to rock bottom are given a seminal role to perform in **Plautus**' plays. Take a look at *Messenio*'s comments about the position of a slave:

*For if the slave is worthy, and he's well brought up,
He'll care to keep his shoulders empty—not to fill his cup
His master will reward him. Let the worthless slave be told
The lowly, lazy louts get whips and chains,
And millstones, great starvation, freezing cold.
The price for all their misbehaviours: pains.
I therefore fully fear this fate and very gladly
Remain determined to be good—so I won't turn out badly.* (970-978)

In voicing the condition of the slaves and the treatment meted out to them, the audience is shown the way in which the slaves are treated. In a situation where slaves are unable to deliver their duties or the work expected of them, they are punished. **Plautus** uses the structure of comedy to present this reality while also tickling the audience with the possibility of the slaves putting forward their case. Moving on, we shall take up *Euclio*'s stinginess and his interface/dealing with the slaves.

2.3 EUCLIO AND THE SLAVES

The first part of the play (there are no formal scene divisions but the play begins with *Euclio*'s entry) establishes *Euclio*'s miserliness. This is done through the use of humour. His erratic behaviour with back and forth movements to his house and constant haranguing with the servant, *Staphyla* convince the audience of him being a miser. This part also brings forth the division of the society into masters and slaves as also the rich and the poor. There is a difference in social hierarchy between *Euclio* and *Staphyla* as there is between the rich neighbour, *Megadorus* and *Euclio* who is a poor man in the eyes of the people. It is obvious that people higher up in the socio-economic scale wield authority while the lower ones are rendered powerless.

Let us take a look at *Euclio*'s introduction in the play as a miser while also paying attention to his treatment of *Staphyla*. In *Pot of Gold*, *Euclio* beats up *Staphyla*, the female servant, calling her a “snooperette” and “pernicious hag”. She is introduced to the audience as someone who questions her fate. She asks *Euclio* pointedly, “Why beat a wretch like me?” The images used to describe the master’s attitude towards the servant are cruel, and yet placed within the comic structure, **Plautus** creates room for questioning this exploitative relationship by making the audience laugh.

*Euclio: Do I owe you a reason—bashed potato face?
Get even further from the door—right over there.
See how she dawdles—do you know how I'd fix you?
If I could only grab a club or pointed stick
I'd speed your tortoise-crawling in a snap, I would.
Staphyla [melodramatically]: Oh, how I wish the gods would string
me up to death.
Death would be a better lot than slave to you. (45-51, 190)*

The tone of the play is set in the first part of the play. The central figure is a miser, whose use of language is completely exaggerated. He is suspicious of everyone, especially the servant. She is the “malefactorix mumbling maid”, “bitch with eyeballs in both front and back”. *Staphyla* on her part is bemused at the strange behaviour of the master, especially as he turns her out of the house at least ten times in a day. Take a look at the humorous tone and use of exaggeration in the play:

*Euclio: At last my mind's becalmed enough to let me leave,
I've just now seen that all is safe inside.
[To maid] Now you go back inside and stay on guard—
Staphyla: What's that
I stay on 'guard'? Are you afraid they'll steal the house?
We've nothing else at all to interest thieving folk.
The house is full of emptiness—and cobwebs. (80-85)*

The element of exaggeration determines all. *Euclio* pleads his poverty and would like his cobwebs “guarded”. His anxiety about the gold determines his movements, behaviour and thinking. *Euclio* tells her to refuse water, fire anything that the neighbours might ask for. In *Euclio*, the playwright creates a character who is alienated from society. As suggested by **Konstan**, denial of water was especially seen as an estrangement from the society. On her part, *Staphyla* remains bewildered with the strange behaviour of her master.

The gap between *Euclio*'s knowledge of the gold and *Staphyla*'s lack of it, tickles the audience to laugh at them while also accepting the undermining of authority. *Euclio*'s address to the audience is an interesting ploy as he takes the viewers into confidence and apprises them of his anxieties regarding the gold. The audience is transformed into a character privy to *Euclio*'s thoughts and the only one to know the whereabouts of the gold. He informs them of how he has to go and claim his few coins for “distribution” else the people will suspect that he has the gold hidden somewhere. This is money that is distributed by the “councilman” to poor people. So *Euclio* must walk all that way to ensure that his poverty is registered in public perception. Where this seems to be the social engagement of the misanthrope, **David Konstan** is quick

to point out that *Euclio* interacts with society only to maintain public appearance and guard the gold more fiercely. He says,

“All of the miser’s social activity is a sham, even commerce or, as here, a petition for a free bequest” (309)

Having introduced the miser and his slave and the gold being taken care of by *Lars*, the play needs to move on, as does our understanding and analysis of it. Let us deal with the marriage proposal thought of by *Lars*.

2.4 THE MARRIAGE PROPOSAL: IMPLICATIONS

The first part of the play is followed by the entry of two more characters—*Megadorus* and his sister, *Eunomia*. He is the Uncle of the boy who “*ravished*” or raped *Euclio*’s daughter, *Phaedria*. The household god *Lar Familiaris* has referred to him in the introductory speech to the play. The audience is aware that *Megadorus* is part of *Familiaris*’s plan to ensure that eventually the young boy is married to *Euclio*’s daughter and that the child has its rightful father.

Megadorus and *Eunomia*’s entry is marked by his reluctance to marry and his sister’s request that he do so. He finally reveals his plan to marry his neighbour *Euclio*’s daughter. *Eunomia* departs, but is not very happy. This part throws up some very interesting aspects of the society to which **Plautus** belongs. *Eunomia*’s views about women reflect on how by and large women were considered to be fickle and inconsequential. Once again these ideas are brought out through the use of humour. As *Eunomia* states:

*Brother please heed me, you need me I know
I’m showing concern that a sister should show,
Although I’m a woman and really don’t matter
(For men think that women just prattle and chatter)* (120-122)

Eunomia’s concern is marked by the understanding that her point of view does not really count. You must note that as *Megadorus*’s sister, she belongs to the upper crust of society and yet is denied a voice. *Eunomia* understands the stereotyping of women as talkative creatures engaging in senseless conversation. In fact she immediately plays on the phrase “*noblest of women*”, used for her by *Megadorus*. She says, “*What ‘noblest’ of women—who’s perfect and quiet?*” It indicates that the ideal woman is one who does not express a point of view and remains a mute spectator to the goings on in society and their treatment of women. *Eunomia* is quick to add, “*No woman is noble—some just are less bad*”. This also points towards women’s insistence on participating in social conversation. We infer that women’s association with silence is essential for power systems to continue. And women’s expression often relegated to idle chatter is an important intervention in the scheme of things.

Another important feature of this world is the dowry system. *Eunomia* urges her brother to marry and promises to get a woman with a

*... gigantic dowry
But in fact one of a mellow age.* (158-159)

However, against this transaction, *Megadorus* chooses to display his magnanimity by marrying a young girl, *Euclio*’s daughter. In the eyes of the people, *Megadorus* has forsaken dowry as *Euclio* is perceived to be a poor man. He tells *Eunomia*—

*Thank heaven and our ancestors, I'm rich enough
I can dispense with social climbing, pride and cushy dowries,
Their shouting and their bossiness, their carriages of ivory.*

(170)

He states unabashedly that he “wants” *Euclio*’s daughter. In short, *Megadorus* forsakes dowry for desire. So *Megadorus* can either expand his assets by an alliance with a rich woman or fulfil his desire by marrying a young woman with no dowry. One must mark that this passion for a younger woman too is suspect. Whatever be the case, there is an inherent sense of transaction in marriage. The women have to be accompanied by either money or youth. It is the playwright’s genius that he brings forth all these social complexities using the comic mode.

The cycle of suspicion begins in the play as *Euclio* wonders at the grand proposal of marriage put forth by *Megadorus*. The miser, *Euclio* is certain that his neighbour has caught whiff of his hidden gold. He suspects *Staphyla* and threatens consequences. But all this is situated in absurdity. Read the following lines carefully:

Euclio [aside]: *Damn—that hag’s showed him the gold its clearly clear.*

When I get home I’ll cut her tongue out and gouge her eyes.

Megadorus: *Talking to yourself?*

Euclio: *Uh yes, bemoaning poverty*

I don’t have enough to give a dowry for my grown-up daughter

So I can’t contract her—

Megadorus: *Oh. Cheer up, Euclio.*

Marry she will—I’ll help you. Tell me what you need?

Euclio [aside]: *My own cash he’s promising. He hungers for my gold,
Holding bread in one hand and a big rock in the other.
Never trust a rich man when he’s civil to a pauper;
When he shakes your hand he really wants to shake you down!*

He’s just like an octopus—he’s fastening his tentacles.

(190-197)

Euclio does not believe *Megadorus*’s game of magnanimity and suspects that he is after the gold. And when *Megadorus* does put the formal marriage proposal to *Euclio* for his daughter, the miser is stupefied. He thinks *Megadorus* is mocking him—“*Making fun of someone without blame—and without any money/ Really—I’ve done nothing to deserve this kind of treatment.*” Where for the most, *Euclio* is seen making fun of his situation, momentarily, he asks *Megadorus* for a rationale. His questioning of *Megadorus*, even as it stems from his anxieties regarding his gold are a telling remark on the society of the times.

Euclio: *Megadorus, it occurs to me that you’re a man of wealth—
Powerful politically—but I’m a pauper of impoverished poverty*

Were I to do a deal with you about my daughter, it would seem

*You were an ox and I an ass. We wouldn't fit together.
Never could we bear an equal load, I'd stumble in the mud.
You, the mighty ox, would scarcely know that I exist.
I'd be so badly treated—my own kind would hee-haw at me.
Should we fall out, I'd be destabilised in every quarter,
All the asses would be biting me, the oxen goring me.
That's the risk when asses try to rise to oxish rank.*

*Megadorus: Nothing could be finer than if people who are fine.
Forge an alliance. Hear me and accept my honest offer
Pledge your daughter—*

Euclio: But I've nothing for a dowry

*Megadorus: Never mind.
Virtue's the most important dowry—and she is rich in that*
(226-239)

This conversation between *Euclio* and *Megadorus* reveals the underlying rules of the society of the times. *Euclio* acknowledges his social subservience to *Megadorus* on the grounds of money. He compares his position to *Megadorus* as akin to that of an “ox” and an “ass”. It means that in the world that **Plautus** belonged to, this alliance was incongruent. They would not fit together. He is sharp enough to imagine a situation in which if there were a fall out then he would be the butt of everyone’s humour. *Megadorus*’ privileging of “virtue” over socio-economic compatibility was a new idea. We know that in England and in English literature this idea comes along only with the emergence of the middle class towards the end of the eighteenth century. Prior to it, the norm was indeed of economic alliances. The introduction of “virtue” as against marriage within the same economic stratum was certainly an interesting idea brought in through the route of the comic play. As he disappears inside to check his gold, *Megadorus*, being a rich man takes *Euclio*’s strange behaviour as an affront. Mark his tone:

*Disappeared without an explanation. Now he snubs me
Just because I want to be his friend. How typical—
When a rich man tries befriending someone less well-off
The poor shrink back in fear and fearfully object,
But when the chance has passed them by too late they have a change
of heart.*
(246-249)

Megadorus’ tone is an assuming one. He is convinced of his act of magnanimity in the form of the proposal extended to *Euclio*. However, *Megadorus* cloaks desire in generosity and ignores the fact that he is much older than this young girl. In a sense he is purchasing her virtue. *Eunomia*’s proposal whereby he would get ample dowry but would marry a woman closer to his age makes more sense. Referring to *Megadorus*’s musings on marriage as a glimpse into “popular Roman psychology”, **David Konstan** explains how *Megadorus*’s desire to marry are based on “irrational passion” and not “customary duty” (313). *Megadorus*, of course has money and no need for more but would rather transform his monetary assets by marrying a young girl. The fact that no dowry is to be paid is something that suits *Euclio* and the ‘deal’ is struck.

Megadorus: Well now—does that mean I get your daughter?

*Euclio: On condition that
You stick by the agreement for the dowry that we*

Megadorus: [nodding assent]: Deal?

Euclio: A deal.
(255-259)

The marriage between *Megadorus* and *Euclio*'s daughter is an agreement to be implemented soon. They are to marry the same day. As *Euclio* rushes off to the market-place for arrangements, *Staphyla* is puzzled as she is privy to her mistress' pregnant condition.

*Mistress is in dire straits and so am I
All of the disgrace will be exposed—the birth is very near.
There's no way to cover what we've hidden up to now*
(274-276)

At this juncture, please mark how the slaves, (considered the social inferiors), play an important role in the world of **Plautus**. They know important secrets, influence the course of events, and have thoughts of their own. They disagree with their 'masters' and **Plautus** gives complete space for them to voice to their ideas. This gives us something to think about but while we dwell on that, the action of the play must go on. A bit more detailed look at the slaves will enhance our understanding of the ancient Roman world.

2.5 THE SLAVE PAGEANT

The slaves are an integral part of **Plautus**'s world. Whether it is a play like *The Brothers Menaechmus* or *The Haunted House* or *The Braggart Soldier*, the slaves make significant interventions. Humour allows people to laugh at the subversion of power, and this might have prompted thinking. We can say that the seeds of transition were surely sown and a process of change initiated. Take a look at the following scene which can well be termed the slave's pageant. They are described in terms of the work and duties they perform. The stage instructions are as follows:

Enter Megadorus' slave Strobilus, a motely procession of Cooks (Anthrax and Congrio) Flute Girls (Phrygia and Elysium) as well as various Slaves bearing festive foods from the market. Traditionally, the Cook wears a short tunic and carries a carving knife.
(199)

As **Segal** mentions in the notes to this play, "*Thomas notes that this is the longest cook scene in all of Roman comedy. This figure has an important function in Menander's Dyskolos*" (Segal 240). In this scene the use of humour delves into the bawdy while also explaining the lives of these people. Due to *Euclio*'s pathetic monetary state, the cooks are to be divided and sent to his house. In the process, *Euclio*'s miserliness is further qualified. Look at the way in which the slaves comment on *Euclio*'s nature. There is an element of exaggeration, but it clarifies the situation and adds to the humour:

*Strobilus: Just see for yourself
He calls on gods and men to witness that he's bankrupt,
Totally wiped out,
If but a smoky wisp blows from his twiggy fire.
And at night he ties a bag around his mouth.*
Anthrax: Why?
Strobilus: So he won't lose any breath while he's asleep.
*Anthrax: Why doesn't he plug up his lower parts as well?
Then he won't even lose a fart when he's asleep.*

(299-306)

*Strobilus: The fellow wouldn't even let you have his hunger, if you asked.
The other day when he had his nails cut by the barber
He scooped up all the bits and took them home with him,
Anthrax: Bu Pollux, what a miserable mingy miser! (311-314)*

Many such instances are recounted to reiterate *Euclio's* miserliness. The witty repartee exhibited by the slaves is worth noting. In **Plautus's** scheme of things the slaves are not only privy to important information but they are capable of understanding situations and possess a point of view about their 'masters'. They also possess the verbal skill to express their ideas. In the play the division of slaves into two teams is carried out and *Congrio* and the "fatter Flute girl, *Phrygia*" are sent to *Euclio's* house. At this stage, another slave *Pythodicus* is given a fragment. According to **Segal**, this seems to be a later addition without any clear reason for this inclusion.

This section establishes *Euclio's* miserliness and also gives dramatic space to the slaves. One can well imagine, placed in its time, the reaction of the viewers to the slaves. And all this happens in the realm of the comic. The slaves constitute a social group that did not enjoy centre space but **Plautus** gives them representation on the stage.

The gossip amongst the slaves and their perception of *Euclio* as stingy is further reinforced as he returns empty-handed from the market without any food or wine for his daughter's wedding. All he manages to get with him is "a pinch of incense and a bloom or two/ To place upon the altar of our Household God" (203). *Euclio* does not even get the bare minimum for the wedding. Back home, he is appalled to see his house full of strangers talking about a pot. Miser, that he is, *Euclio* decides to keep it a stark wedding and guard his gold. He is appalled to see his house having been taken over by the cooks and wastes no time in throwing them out.

As *Congrio* and the other servants are pushed out of the house, the tone of exaggeration employed in the play allows the slaves and servants to voice their opinion with equal fierceness as their employers. Take a look at this exchange between *Euclio* and *Congrio*:

Euclio: Stop thief! Stop thief!
Congrio: what's all this shouting for you fool?
Euclio: Shouting for policemen to arrest you.
Congrio: Why? What for?
Euclio: Carrying a knife.
Congrio: [waving the blade]. To cook.
Euclio: Don't threaten me!
Congrio: I was wrong—I should've stuck it right straight through you
Euclio: Nowhere on this earth is there a bigger criminal than you!
No one that I'd beat to death with greater pleasure.
Congrio: Pollux—why the proof's already in your beating
All your pounding's made me softer than a dancer boy!
What gives you the right to hit me filthy beggar?
Euclio: Cheeky question—that means you didn't get enough!
 (416-420)

It was indeed a “cheeky question” as the slaves were only supposed to obey orders. But in the Plautine world they confront the ‘master’, challenge and undermine their authority while also asserting themselves. Earlier too we saw how *Staphyla* questioned *Euclio* on the treatment meted out to her. Having freed his house of the cooks, *Euclio* rushes in to get the pot of gold and asks the cooks to finish their job. Verbal innuendo and puns add to the comic twists in the play. As *Congrio* tells *Euclio*,

*Hey I ought to bill you for my injuries, you know?
When they hired me they said it was for making punch, not being
punched* (455-456).

This verbal banter adds to the comic effect and creates space for these marginal characters. **Plautus** shows through the element of exaggeration as to how easy it is for the social superiors to treat the slaves any way they want. But it is significant that the playwright counters the arguments of the ones in power.

2.6 LET US SUM UP

In terms of the plot line, you can see how the *Prologue* to the play presents a brief ancestry of the *Pot of Gold*. *Lars Familiaris* explains his intentions of ensuring a happy ending for the miser’s daughter. This unit focussed on developing *Euclio*’s character as a miser and the implications of *Megadorus*’s proposal for his daughter. The discussion on marriage gives a view of the position of women within marriage. An important aspect discussed in this unit is the role of the slaves who do not sit back and accept the treatment meted out to them by their employers. They reject it, intervene and ask questions. All this is done within the gamut of the comic structure and the use of exaggeration to make these tricky issues palatable to the Roman audience.

2.7 GLOSSARY

Ceres	: Ceres was the goddess of agriculture. A festival was held in honour of Ceres. It was generally held for seven days. Games were also a part of the festival
Miser	: one who cannot part with his money
Misanthrope	: one who is estranged from society
Fides	: Goddess of trust
Silvanus	: The woodland god

2.8 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the role of Lar Familiaris in Plautus’s *Pot of Gold*.
2. What are the different devices used to project *Euclio* as a miser?
3. Analyse critically the play’s assessment of the society of its time.
4. Does *Pot of Gold* shed light on the position of women in society? Give instances to substantiate your argument.
5. Explain the structure of marriage in the play.
6. How are the slaves presented in the *Pot of Gold*?

UNIT 3 POT OF GOLD-II

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 A View of Society in Rome
- 3.3 The People of Rome
- 3.4 Taking the Plot ahead
- 3.5 The Audience in Plautus's Plays
- 3.6 'Renouncing' Phaedria
- 3.7 The Ending
- 3.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.9 Glossary
- 3.10 Questions

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In the previous unit we looked at the construction of characters and the beginnings of the plot line. The first part of the play establishes *Euclio* as a miser. *Megadorus*'s proposal of marriage to *Euclio*'s daughter has been accepted and the servants are busy executing orders for the wedding feast. In this chaos, *Euclio* moves his pot of gold outside the house and a new string of events begin. This unit will acquaint us with further developments in the plot line. It will help us understand Roman society with special reference to the position of women and slaves. In this unit, we will also be able to get a broad spectrum picture of the different social groups in Rome apart from the slaves and the masters.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Having said that let us analyse *Megadorus*'s speech further to try and see what Roman society of that time was like. To understand the worldview of the Romans it is important to look at their attitude towards the institution of marriage and the position of women within it. *Megadorus*'s musings on marriage give an insight into the workings of Roman society. We understand the treatment meted out to women both in terms of class and gender.

3.2 A VIEW OF SOCIETY IN ROME

From *Megadorus*'s speech, it is clear that the Romans followed a system of dowry. *Megadorus* shares with the audience the anxieties related to the dowry brought by the rich women in marriage. He prefers his stance of marrying a young virtuous girl without any dowry. The advantages as he sees it are many. Firstly, he equates virtue with poverty. The idea is that women without dowry are the virtuous ones. Secondly, he believes they would be far less extravagant. The absence of any financial strength from their parents' side would also keep them demure in front of their husbands. In short, marrying a woman without dowry would give the man an advantage. In contrast, the women with dowry are seen as arrogant and spendthrifts. According to *Megadorus*, their greed is beyond measure. Further, they left no stone unturned in driving home to their husbands the benefits of dowry. In the light of these initial comments take a close look at *Megadorus*'s speech:

*I've talked to many friends
 about my marriage plans—
 they spoke with admiration of my neighbour's daughter.
 And they said that I was acting admirably well,
 In fact I think if other rich men would do likewise
 And marry girls of humble stock who don't have dowries
 There also would be much more peace throughout the city.
 And other folk would envy us far less than now.
 Our wives would also show us more respect
 And our expenses would be less extravagant.
 I think this would be sound advice for most of us.
 The argument would come from just the money-grubbing
 few—
 Their greed's so great that no law can limit it
 Or any shoemaker take its measure
 Now you may ask—whom will the dowried ladies wed
 If all men accept your preference for the poor?
 Let them wed anyone—as long as they forsake their dowries
 And bring along some virtues—in the place of cash in hand,
 Believe me they'd be better wives than they are now.
 ...
 No more would wives complain 'You know
 the sum I brought you—
 You never had more cash in your entire life (474-494; 498-499)*

On reading this speech one can mark various social divisions. On the one hand are the rich men and on the other are the women, with dowry and without it. In the first case, the men with plenty seem to be doing a favour to the women without dowry by initiating their escalation to a higher social group. And of course, in the process their gain is noteworthy. Men like *Megadorus* are likely to get younger women like *Euclio's* daughter. But over and above this, they have the advantage of being treated as superiors within the family unit. By marrying women without any financial assets, the men do not run the risk of the woman pulling rank and trying to control them. This also indicates that in the society of the times, one of the ways in which the 'dowried' women could be assertive was through the money they brought into the household. The women from ordinary households did not have this opportunity. They had to rely on 'virtue' to get them a comfortable home. This social analysis conducted by *Megadorus* is from the point of view of an upper class male who looks at his own convenience in a marriage. The idea of 'virtue' sustains the institution of marriage. However, this becomes a trap for women as to be virtuous is equivalent to being mute and passive. A rich dowry gives women a chance to be assertive and to create their own rules, an idea that is countered by 'virtue'. The musings of *Megadorus* shed some light on the social norms and conventions of the times. It would therefore be pertinent to examine this in detail next.

3.3 THE PEOPLE OF ROME

Through the character of *Megadorus* we get an insight into the colourful world of Rome. We generally understand this society through the powerful people depicted in the tragedies and comedies. But **Plautus** gives us a window into the ordinary people of Rome. These are the people who contribute to society

through their work. They are recognised socially in terms of the work they perform. As *Megadorus* recounts the kind of extravagance the rich women are involved in, we understand the different kinds of things produced in society and the people who are involved in its production. Due to women's extravagance, the following creditors appear:

*The cleaner, tailor, jeweller and embroiderer,
The woolifier, linen-maker, fringe-maker, tunic-maker
Crimson-dyer, brown-dyer, violet-dyer,
The salesmen, craftsmen, tradesmen of every sort,
The boot-maker, sandal-maker, slipper-maker, girdle-maker
Oh, look who's here for money—it's the dry-cleaner, belt-maker.*

...
*Why here's three hundred more collectors waiting for you.
The weavers, the tassel-makers, cabinet-makers just to start
In they come, you come pay them, and then you think you've seen
the last
But in march the saffron-dyers—damn them all—*

(508-513; 517-521)

So apart from the people who have the money, there are those who perform small jobs to earn a living. These are skilled workers who will soon go on to become the merchants and tradesmen in the near future. One can easily think of the kind of space they will occupy in **Geoffrey Chaucer's** *The General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* in the 14th century and further in the course of history in **William Shakespeare's** plays where they will intervene directly in important events. And of course in the 18th and 19th centuries this social group grows and consolidates itself to struggle for its rights. So we actually trace the visibility of this group in the ancient world, and the Roman comedies of **Plautus**. These people receive a slight mention in the play but give us a wider expanse of the social composition of the times. Significantly, this nebulous group of people, not really a social class in that sense, are related to acquisitiveness. They sell products that the women are tempted to buy. One can mark the beginnings of a world where commodities and eventually the process of buying and selling will hold an important place. *Megadorus* concludes by stating the following:

*These tribulations and unbearable expenses
Are just a few of the ills that come with dowries.
But she who brings no cash does bring obedience,
While rich girls kill their husbands with their mischief and
extravagance.*

(532-535)

These lines clarify that the only draw that the men with money have for 'virtuous' women without dowry is subjugation to their husbands. The women from rich families not only bring a dowry, but also a financial assertion over which the husband has little control. It points towards an independence purchased through money so the women can live on their own terms. But this is considered to be an "ill". The woman who does not bring a dowry is someone who brings with her "obedience". Their lives are subject to the will of the husband. But their situation is doubly fragile. Not only are these women supposed to obey their husbands but the assumption that they are not spend-thrift also indicates that these women would not have free access to the financial assets of their

husbands. So they are really speaking dependent on the man they marry for everything. The fact that the rich women exercise control over the lives and money of their husbands, is resented by the man. *Megadorus*'s insights on marriage also contribute significantly in carrying the plot – forward.

3.4 TAKING THE PLOT AHEAD

Euclio overhears *Megadorus*'s insights into marriage and women. This is followed by a kind of verbal game between *Megadorus* and *Euclio*. He criticises his son-in-law - to - be for sending the “crooks” in all the “nooks” and calling them “cooks”. He wants to “pick a bone” with *Megadorus* only to let it mean a lamb that is only bone. This kind of verbal play adds to the comic flavour of the play. It highlights *Euclio*'s obsessive miserliness and *Megadorus*'s bewilderment at this strange behaviour. This creates the idea of the famous Plautine humour.

In the previous unit we examined the relevance of slaves in **Plautus**'s dramas. In the first part of the play, the slaves are seen resisting the kind of verbal and physical abuse they are subjected to from within the comic structure. In the second part, *Strobilus* outlines the function of the slave. S/he must pay full allegiance to the master—“*Even he's sleeping he must serve his master in his dreams.*” Interestingly, *Strobilus* also sees a guiding role for the slaves so as to protect the interest of their masters. They must prevent them from succumbing to passion. S/he must be a “*raft to hold his lovesick master up*”. Is there a new role that has been envisaged for the slaves or is **Plautus** simply presenting their standard performance in society? As **Matthew Leigh** points out,

In the case of Plautus, a significant feature is the elaboration of the role of the wily slave or servus callidus, a figure of such brilliance that he can take control of the entire course of the drama and whose triumph the comedy is destined to depict. That slave frequently transcends his lowly status by means of transformation or identification. He can become a teacher, an actor manager, a philosopher, or a priest.

(25)

The slaves were to be totally devoted to their masters. But they were generally not supposed to express any opinion. This idea of the slaves performing socially alters the conventional role and function accorded to them. In fact **Plautus** goes a step ahead as he even places them in a sort of advisory capacity as *Strobilus* is to *Lyconides* or *Staphyla* is to her mistress. There is a kind of loyalty that binds the master-slave relationship. This loyalty allows them to protect their ‘master’ and in doing so they significantly alter the course of the play.

In a bid to fulfil his master's desires *Strobilus* keeps a watch on *Euclio*'s house only to discover the secret about the pot of gold. On seeing many people inside, the miser shifts his treasured possession outside the house. He entrusts the Shrine of Trust with his gold. However, *Strobilus* finds out about it and goes into the shrine. “*Trust*” indicates a kind of bond between the divinity and the individual at a personal level. Both *Euclio* and *Strobilus* are seen communicating with the goddess at different moments in the play. *Euclio* tells the goddess, “*Trust, I'm trusting you not to tell anyone about my gold*” (608). The fact that *Strobilus* too seeks a personal relation is interesting. He pleads, “*Please, Trust, don't be faithfuller to Euclio than to me*” (618). There is also a play on the word ‘trust’ as *Strobilus* seeks to empty the “*trusty jug*”. But just at the

moment a raven croaks and *Euclio* comes back to find *Strobilus* in the temple and he drags him out. What ensues is a kind of word play which adds to the comic effects in the play. *Euclio* tells *Strobilus*:

*Out, out you worm, what hole have you just crawled from?
How did you suddenly appear? Now that you have you'll disappear
Mangy malefactor! I'll destroy you in a thousand wretched ways.*
(628-630)

Exaggeration, pun, alliteration are all coupled with the bawdy. Take a look at these lines to understand **Plautus**'s use of the bawdy:

*Euclio: You won't get away with this.
Strobilus: What do you want?
Euclio: Get it up
Strobilus: You're not my type. I just can't get it up for you.*
...
*Euclio: you're hiding something in your tunic
Strobilus [with a leer]: Grope me anywhere* (633-636; 645-646)

Strobilus plays on this sexual innuendo. This is an important element of Plautine humour. *Euclio* does not find anything on *Strobilus* and as he hears some noise from the shrine he heads back into the temple and decides to leave the slave out. However, this is where **Plautus** gives a twist to the regular plot. The slave *Strobilus* is presented in flesh and blood. He not only thinks and speak but he also decides to take revenge and punish *Euclio*. *Strobilus* shares his plans with the audience:

*I'd rather die a wretched rotten deadly death
Than let that codger go without a permission.
For, now, I'm sure, he won't dare hide his gold in here.
He'll move, change his address and take it all with him.
But hush—the door's just creaked. Look, look he's dragging
out the gold.
I'll hide here by the doorway for a little while.* (661-666)

In *Strobilus*, **Plautus** presents the slave's revenge even if momentarily. He hints at the feelings, thoughts and response of the slaves and it is a monologue heard by the audience. As **Timothy J Moore** points out:

The slave speaks a variation of the "goodslave" speech (587-607), the longest monologue since the prologue that is not spoken or observed by Euclio. The monologue helps bring the slave the rapport he needs to win over the audience: he is, after all, both a tricky slave and a thief. At the same time, it provides the play's first significant threat to Euclio's position as principal liaison between stage and audience. (44-45)

As mentioned earlier, these subversive ideas become a possibility within the comic structure. The audience would have surely laughed at the situation considering it is this idea of retaliation that leads to a further complication in the plot. After searching him, *Euclio* lets go of *Strobilus* and shifts the gold from *Trust* to *Silvanus*. It is indeed ironic that the miser has invested faith in the goddess of *Trust* but when he shifts faith to *Silvanus* is, when he loses the gold. **David Konstan** explains how this is also a shift from the precincts of the "civilised

community” where truth and honour prevail to the wilderness (310). Unaware that *Strobilus* is watching him, he transfers the pot of gold. As soon as *Euclio* is out, *Strobilus* steals the pot of gold, he sees it as “*salvo of salvation*”. *Euclio* is devastated on discovering the loss. But *Strobilus* is elated at his possession. Take a close look at *Strobilus*’s speech:

*I’m rich—not all the fabled birds from realms of gold
Can match my wealth and never mind those paltry little kings
I am now that fabled Philip, king of gold. Oh what a day.*

(701-704)

The slave, *Strobilus*, considers himself to be richer than all other kings. He will soon envision buying his freedom through this newly acquired wealth. In *The Brothers Menaechmus*, the slave *Messenio*, asks for his freedom. Having helped resolved the confusion regarding the twins he asserts his claim to freedom and is granted the same. This idea is considered “*fair and fine*” by *Menaechmus I*. The final pronouncement by *Menaechmus II*, “*Be thou free*” gives the slave a new lease of life. He later helps auction the goods belonging to *Menaechmus I*. We have been analysing the play at length, but drama as we know, also requires an audience. Let us look at **Plautus**’s audience next.

3.5 THE AUDIENCE IN PLAUTUS’S PLAYS

In the world of **Plautus**, the audience is transformed into an actor. From the beginning of the play, the audience is privy to *Euclio*’s machinations. When *Strobilus* shares details of his deed, it is the audience that is privy to this information. As a result, when *Euclio* discovers his gold has been stolen, he urges the audience to share details with him. He tells them:

*I can’t think straight. [To the audience] Please help me, I
beseech on my knees.
Please, I beg and I implore you—just show me who stole it.
[To a spectator in the front row] and what are you saying?
I’ll believe you for sure. Your bearing’s so honest, your expression
so pure.*

*But what is it—why laugh you? I know you’re all crooks here!
So you’re dressed in white togas and have the best seats,
There are the crooks ‘mongst the mighty—and swindlers and
cheats.*

*What—none of you has it? Oh no, then I’m dead
You mean you can’t tell me?*

*[With incredulous despair] Then tell me who’s got it? I’m
Losing my head!* (713-722)

Euclio in his state of frenzy, talks to the audience, chides it and blames them for not revealing the truth. As **Alison Sharrock** aptly states:

*At the moment of tragic climax, however, Euclio does something
which probably no tragic actor ever did: he addresses the audience
directly, like a modern pantomime actor, and pulls no punches in
smashing the dramatic illusion, in order to ask for the audience’s
help to find the thief.* (199)

He accuses the audience, suggesting that one of them might have stolen the gold. You must pay attention to the lines,

*So you're dressed in white togas and have the best seats
There are the crooks 'mongst the mighty—and swindlers and cheats*
(718-719)

One can visualise the society of the time with the privileged in their “white togas” sitting in the front. **Plautus** does not spare them as he indicates that virtue was not the repository of the rich. There are amongst them “swindlers and cheats”. It is the comic lens that allows **Plautus** to offer a critique of the wealthy and powerful seated in the front rows of the theatrical space. **Moore** too states:

The actor playing Euclio teases the spectators more directly, accusing them of being thieves. Once again, then, Plautus emphasises two realities and two attitudes: the spectators are encouraged to respond simultaneously to both actors and characters, and to appreciate both the subservience and the license of the actors/characters. (49)

As the audience is privy to the secrets of all the characters, they remain not mere spectators but actors who are spoken to at various junctures in the play. Continuing with the analysis of the play, we need to keep a watch on *Phaedria*.

3.6 ‘RENOUNCING’ PHAEDRIA

Meanwhile *Lyconides* informs his mother, *Eunomia*, of his relationship with *Phaedria*. On her part, *Eunomia*, acts in a noble manner and tells him that she will convince her brother, *Megadorus* to give up this liaison so he can marry *Phaedria*. As a mother, she does not defend her son’s deed and in fact reminds him,

*... what's more, it is the proper thing—if as you say
You...forced the blameless girl when you had drunk too much*
(688-689)

The plot thickens as *Phaedria* is now towards the end of her pregnancy and is about to deliver.

The characteristic duality, of the pot of gold and *Phaedria*’s pregnant condition, maintained throughout the play is finally brought to a close towards the end. The word play between *Lyconides* and *Euclio* continues as the young man seeks the miser’s forgiveness. Where *Euclio* laments the loss of gold, *Lyconides* apologises for having wronged *Phaedria*. It is indeed ironic that as a father, *Euclio* is only concerned about his gold and is unaware of the true state of his daughter. *Phaedria*’s rape is the expression of the theft in the family structure—“Both are violation of his proprietary rights” (**Konstan** 313). Finally, *Euclio* discovers his daughter’s condition and gives his consent to the marriage. The verbal exchange points out ironically *Euclio*’s complete lack of awareness in his daughter’s well-being. He is obsessed with the pot of gold and cannot see the real situation for what it is.

*Euclio: Whatever have I done to you young man?
 Why did you behave so bringing such misfortune on
 us all?*

Lyconides: Passion—ruthless God—compelled me irresistibly ...
Euclio: How'd you ever dare to lay a finger on what wasn't yours?
Lyconides: Nothing can be changed, the deed is done—and cannot be undone
Heaven willed it, I suppose. How could it happen otherwise?
(736-37;740 - 41)

And then examine the final revelation:

Euclio: I already have reason to take you straight into court.
That's unless you give back—
Lyconides: Give what back?
Euclio: What you've just robbed from me
Lyconides what on earth are you discussing? I've not robbed
[stunned]: a thing from you.
Euclio: Jupiter—The man pretends he doesn't know!
Lyconides: Unless you tell me.
Euclio : Pot of gold! That's what you stole from me
[histrionically] and just confessed you did. (759-763)

At this point in the play, the confusion between *Euclio* and *Lyconides* is resolved. The pot of gold continues to be missing. But once again analyse the language used by *Lyconides* for the calling off of the wedding ceremony:

Lyconides: You have a daughter.
Euclio: That's correct—at least at home I do
Lyconides: Pledged to marry Uncle Megadorus—
Euclio: That is quite correct.
Lyconides: Uncle's told me to announce that he's renouncing her today.
Euclio: What—when all's prepared, the ceremony set—the man's renouncing?
All the immortal gods and goddesses should curse him Utterly.

He's the wretched reason I've lost my pot of gold today.

Lyconides: Do cheer up and hold your curses. Rather ask for blessings now
For yourself and for your daughter—say with me 'so please the gods'.
Euclio : Please the gods
[nodding]
Lyconides: And may I ask for blessings for myself as well.
Now listen here:
No man on this earth's so base he's not ashamed by some misdeed he's done,
Wanting to unsmirch his name. Now I appeal to you,
If unwittingly I've wronged you - or your daughter please Pardon me and let me marry her - as, by the way, the laws demand.
Freely I confess that I have wronged your daughter dreadfully,
Driven by the wine and wildness at the festival of Ceres.
(782-792)

Take a look at the word “*renounce*” in this conversation. *Phaedria* is renounced by *Megadorus*. She is not asked, has no say in either the fixing of this match or her renunciation. Her fate seems to be a deal finalised and called off at the behest of a powerful man. One must not lose sight of the fact that *Phaedria* is looked at as a woman without any dowry. Her renunciation is executed with ease. The hypothetical possibility that if *Megadorus* were to renounce her and there was no *Lyconides* around to salvage her situation, would make *Phaedria*’s life a lost case. As a woman without dowry her chances in society would be bleak. *Megadorus*’s comments on women without dowry must be brought in at this point to question the fate of the woman were the rich man to renounce her. *Lyconides*’s comments are insightful as he mentions how most men can claim of such misdeeds. It appears that the sexual exploitation of young women is not surprising. On his part, *Lyconides*, is convinced he is doing something ‘noble’ by marrying the woman he has ‘wronged’. One also needs to look critically at *Euclio*’s position, as a father. Momentarily enraged at his daughter’s predicament, his thoughts are soon driven back to the pot of gold and he blames *Megadorus* for this loss. Indeed as *Euclio* finds out, he realises the situation to be, “*Countless, catastrophic, cataclysms confound my life*” (801). We are almost reaching the end of the play at this stage. So let’s find out what occurs next.

3.7 THE ENDING

Meanwhile, *Strobilus* seeks freedom through the four pound pot of gold and in the process reveals the theft. He urges his master to transact gold for his freedom—“*Now please, sir, set me free*”, while *Lyconides* snubs him as “*filthy fount of felony*”. Even as he then tries to deny it, *Lyconides* is certain the pot of gold is with *Strobilus*. He demands, “*Give me back the gold*”. The play breaks off with *Strobilus* challenging the master regarding the gold, “*By Hercules, you will have to kill me or you will never get it*” (832). In the world of **Plautus**, this exposition by the slaves, their yearning and candid demand for freedom shows the way ahead.

At this point the manuscript breaks off. As this is a comedy and as **Segal** points out, based on the verses available one can conjecture that the end was a happy one and the pot of gold was finally given to the newly-weds. The final statement: “*I never had a moment’s peace—not day or night. Now I can rest*”, indicates the peace that *Euclio* must have felt at parting with the gold. He no longer had to guard it. As **Segal** states in the introduction:

Euclio is a man obsessed, a true monomaniac whose every waking thought—and he does not sleep at all—is his hidden treasure. He lives in perpetual panic, ever suspicious that every passer-by on the street is equally mad and bent on robbing him. (xxxv)

Using the comic structure, **Plautus** gives the play a happy ending (as indicated). But the discussions around women, dowry and marriage at large are only seemingly resolved with *Lyconides*’s marriage proposal. *Phaedria*’s condition draws attention to the precarious social context in which women are placed. The entire discourse of the play is based on the “ravishing” of *Phaedria*, a euphemism for rape. The giving of the pot of gold to *Lyconides* is the dowry that integrates the miser and *Phaedria* back into the social structure. The slaves may not have been granted freedom, but their machinations point towards the anxieties for freedom.

3.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, apart from a completion of the plot line, we also inferred the position of women in Roman society and the system of dowry. The association of virtue with women without dowry and a financial arrogance for “dowried” women emerges. Unlike the ‘virtuous’ women in poverty, the women with financial assets can boast of both security, certain independence of lifestyle and control over their husband. The latter part of the play resolves the complications of the plot while focussing specially on the predicament of women and the slaves. *Strobilus* seeks revenge on *Euclio* for misdemeanour and steals his gold. He nurtures the desire of freedom through this gold and asks *Lyconides* to release him. However the plot gears towards the marriage of *Lyconides* and *Phaedria* who finally get the gold. True to the comic spirit, the play ends on a happy note by resolving the issues. But it is in the presentation of the complex social issues that the real social pictures emerges. The *Pot of Gold*, works towards the reintegration of *Euclio* into social life as he gives the pot of gold to his daughter in marriage and restores his own peace of mind. This abandonment of the monomania with the giving up of the pot of gold brings *Euclio* back as participatory member of the society.

3.9 GLOSSARY

<i>Philip, king of gold</i>	: a wealthy king
<i>Trusty jug</i>	: this is a pun on the goddess of trust. The idea is that, this will soon be emptied by Euclio
<i>Dowried</i>	: the referrence is to women from rich families who get a hefty dowry with them
<i>Commodity</i>	: object

3.10 QUESTIONS

- 1 Critically comment on the position of women with respect to the system of dowry within marriage.
- 2 How does Strobilus intervene in the plot of the play?
- 3 Can Strobilus’s desire for freedom be fulfilled? Give reasons for your answer
- 4 Describe Phaedria’s position in the play.
- 5 Comment on the ending of the play
- 6 Can you think of another ending to the play? If so, what would that be?

UNIT 4 *POT OF GOLD*: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
 - 4.1 Introduction
 - 4.2 *Fabula Palliata*
 - 4.3 The Structure of the *Pot of Gold*
 - 4.4 Euclio as “agelast”
 - 4.5 Dowry, Market and Acquisition in *The Pot of Gold*
 - 4.6 Ending of *The Pot of Gold*
 - 4.7 Let Us Sum Up
 - 4.8 Hints to Check Your Progress
 - 4.9 Glossary
 - 4.10 Suggested Readings & References
-

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall take up, in detail, the important issues in *The Pot of Gold* and the perspective of modern day critics towards them. The themes and ideas analysed here are the structure of the play as a *Fabula Palliate*, *Euclio* and *Phaedria*'s alienation from society, and the ensuing process of their social integration. The composition of Roman society, system of dowry and the institution of marriage will be examined with respect to changes in the market and social practices of the times. Finally we will be acquainted with the implications of the ending of the play.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This section will focus on the structure of the Roman comedy and **Plautus**'s role as playwright in contributing to it a certain form. The Roman comedies of **Plautus** and **Terence** are referred to as the *Fabula Palliata*. What then was the *Fabula Palliate*? We shall examine that next.

4.2 FABULA PALLIATA

Fabula Palliate were re-workings or adaptations of the original Greek plays. Characters and broad plot outlines remained the same but playwrights such as **Plautus** were able to introduce in them the context of Rome, its people, society and the issues concerning the Romans. For instance take a look at these lines from the prologue to the play *The Brothers Menaechmus*:

*Now here's the plot. Please listen with your whole attention span;
I'll tell it in the very fewest words I can.*

[A digression] Now comic poets do this thing in every play:

'It all takes place in Athens, folks,' is what they say.

So that way everything will seem more Greek to you.

But I reveal the real locations when I speak to you.

This story's Greekish, but to be exact,

It's not Athenish, it's Sicilyish, in fact.

(6-12)

So from within the fold of the *fabula palliata*, different situations within the Roman context were brought to the fore. The references to Greek places or contexts was interesting as it allowed the audience to accept the subversive elements in the plays as they watched under the illusion that this was happening, say in Athens. But, the situations, humour, context was that of Rome. Moreover, the audience would have understood these plays as Roman plays, remaining unfamiliar with their Greek originals, an idea that critics have often pointed out.

Check Your Progress 1

1. Analyse the Pot of Gold as a *Fibula Palliata*.

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4.3 THE STRUCTURE OF THE *POT OF GOLD*

As a result, the audience sees a confluence of varied cultural influences with aspects they could relate to and enjoy. The “Greekish” was merged with the “Sicilyish”. **Plautus** not only emphasised that his performers were both actors and characters; he also kept his audience continually aware that the actors/characters were both Greek and Roman. **Plautus**’s plays are generally set in Greek locales. The characters make allusions to Greek customs even as they present to the Roman audience mannerisms that belong to them and not Greece. As **Timothy Moore** explains this idea:

Even as his use of Greek settings distanced his characters from his audience’s reality, therefore, Plautus played with the setting in such a way as to bring those characters closer to home. At the same time, geographical allusions contributed significantly to both the humour and the metatheatrical nature of his plays...Through most of Aulularia, the setting is a vague foreign locale. There are no explicit allusions to the play’s setting in Athens until, late in the play, Lyconides’ slave enters with Euclio’s stolen pot of gold and crows, “quis me Athenis nunc magis quisquam est homo cui di sint propitii?” (“Who is there in Athens now to whom the gods are kinder than they are to me?” 810). When the slave’s audacity reaches its height, Plautus underlines the Athenian setting. (59-60)

So from the point of view of the audience despite a Greek locale, the larger rubric of issues, language and humour, remained Roman. The comic effect became increasingly layered and took the audience through complex issues while maintaining a level of ease, given the illusion that this was happening in Greece. This is where the convergence of the Greek structure and the Roman socialisation of the same acquires meaning. As **Moore** points out this idea was particularly productive when it came to the portrayal of the slaves. These people otherwise expected to be loyal, with only one voice—that of the master, were seen playing truant. They experimented with thoughts and desired freedom, an idea forbidden to them. **Moore**’s assertion of metatheatricality in **Plautus**’s plays is significant as it tells us that the moment the play becomes difficult for the audience to handle it is displaced to its antecedent. There is a “theatrical self-consciousness” as **Plautus** is able to “re-theatricalise an alien drama for his Roman audience”

(Slater 6). This juxtaposition of the Greek model with the Roman context led to the presentation of a wide range of issues ranging from love, and marriage to dowry.

In Unit-I we looked at the difference between the style of Old comedy and the New comedy. The Roman plays inclined more towards New comedy than to the earlier Greek form of Old comedy. We must keep in mind that where the Old Comedy focussed on issues political, New Comedy worked around different parameters. According to **Costas Panayotakis** in “Comedy, Atellane Farce and Mime”:

The successful adoption and original adaptation of Greek New Comedy by Roman theatrical culture was not an isolated artistic phenomenon, but should be seen in the wider context of the cultural influence Greece—through military conquests and merchants’ travels to Greek-speaking lands – exerted on Roman civilization in terms of literature, morals and material culture, and also in relation to the current political circumstances: it was safer to deride fictional characters and social institutions rather than real individuals, and it was even more convenient if these were associated with a foreign nation. On the other hand, the amusingly chaotic world of Roman adaptations of Greek New Comedy, and the subversion of the social hierarchy witnessed in them, served both as a pleasant break from the routine of everyday life and as a case of ‘negative exemplarity’: the plays with their happy endings featuring the punishment of the bad and the reward of the good functioned as a salutary re-enforcement of the values, order and discipline that traditional Romans so strongly advocated for their families and themselves.

(Harrison 131-132)

Therefore, apart from the shift from the wider social canvas to the individual or the family unit, we also learn that there is a sense of “chaos” presented on stage. And this chaos is “subversive”. Even though the plays might end with restoring order as **Panayotakis** points out, it is in the chaos that the challenge to the social order can be located. This is the purpose and function of the metatheatricality visible in the play. The critic explains how, “**Plautus** neither translates faithfully nor adapts loosely his Greek originals: he transforms them into extravagant musical shows, and essentially alters both the substance of Greek New Comedy and the social hierarchy of his time. (Harrison 135). And it is in this transformation that the creative genius of the playwright can be seen. We said that we would look at *Euclio* and *Phaedria*’s alienation from society. Lets’ begin by discussing *Euclio* next.

4.4 EUCLIO AS “AGELAST”

From a reading of his plays one can understand that as a playwright, **Plautus** understood the world through the lens of realism. He was able to see things for what they were. We need to keep in mind that **Plautus** was “the first professionally self-supporting playwright in the history of world literature” (Slater 6). His awareness of the ground reality and its theatricalisation can be seen with clarity in his plays.

The title of the play, *Pot of Gold* draws immediate attention to the importance given to money and as a consequence, *Euclio's* character demands attention. Who is this person and what aspect of Roman society does he represent? According to **Segal** in *Roman Laughter*:

The Romans had a violent aversion to spending anything, as Polybius notes further: "their punctiliousness about expenditures is as intense as their compulsion to turn every second of time into profit" (31.27.11). One of Plautus' most brilliant characters, Euclio the miser, reflects this trait, caricatured to absurdity. He would not only refuse to expend the energy for laughter, but he is parsimonious even with his ordinary breath. (54-55)

Segal's views provide an insight into the workings of Roman society. So, here is a character who is obsessed with preserving gold so much so that he does not let it come into circulation. The miser does not try to increase his wealth nor does he spend it. He does not reveal his newly acquired status for fear of theft. It seems as if his possession of the gold is a moment of stasis that will not allow any change. This extreme attitude to wealth, as **Segal** explains, reflects on the Roman's aversion to spending; an idea that is challenged in the play. There are many ways of looking at the figure of the miser, *Euclio*. Ostensibly, he is a person fixated with guarding his pot of gold. The treasure is wealth that has been transferred from one generation to the next as mentioned by the household god, *Lar Familiaris*. The household god informs the audience how *Euclio* did not belong to the upper crust of the society, despite being in possession of the pot of gold. The *Lar* chose to not reveal it to his predecessors as they did not pay allegiance to him. As a result the gold is not wealth that has added to the family's assets at any point in time. It remains a frozen entity. The *Lar* presents the prologue and the series of events that will take place. He also determines the plot by playing around with the hidden wealth, the pot of gold. According to **Alison Sharrock**:

Irrelevant though it is directly to the plot, however, the series also has a programmatic effect, for this play will be about the proper movement of property between the generations – and it is that which was so sadly lacking in Euclio's ancestry. The Lar has given us, in effect, 'spare' information. (35)

This "spare" information gives us an idea of *Euclio's* world. The prologue explains clearly that *Euclio* has been given this pot of gold so it can be passed on to his daughter, *Phaedria* as she had served the household god with sincerity. So far this has been stagnant wealth, not part of any social transaction. *Euclio*, as miser, is seen not only as guardian of this wealth, but also as a misanthrope who does not participate in any socialisation of money or relations. In short, he is placed outside the socio-economic discourse.

In this context, **Eric Segal** elaborates the figure of the "agelast" who denies the pleasure principle of a comedy. He is also referred to as the spoilsport. Come what may he finds it difficult to participate in the comic strain of the play. According to **Segal**:

This group of "spoilsports," incapable of play, constitute the antagonists

to the comic spirit. In one way or another, but usually in a literal sense, they remain “on the job.”... These non-players are also non-laughers, and in the discussion to follow they will be referred to as “agelasts,” (70)

Akin to *Malvolio* in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, **Segal** sees *Euclio* as a person who is unable to participate in any form of laughter in the play. An interesting explanation is given by **Segal** for the genesis of this figure. According to the critic, there were enough number of people in Roman society pre-occupied with everyday matters related to money. This prevented them from partaking in the joyous aspects of society even when it did not cost them anything. **Segal** explains thus:

As we have already demonstrated, the average Roman was preoccupied with financial matters, and to enjoy himself he would have had to banish from his mind not some vague “loathed Melancholy” but a very specific concern about money. This fact explains why the Plautine agelast is almost always connected with alienum aes, a bill to be paid... But the most common trait of the Plautine agelast is greed, an obsession with lucrum, making him a caricature of the typical materialistic Roman. Euclio, the miser in the Aulularia, is perhaps the most famous example. (75-76)

As a miser, *Euclio* is the “agelast” not so much for being melancholic but for his greed regarding the pot of gold. **Segal** further points out how **Plautus**'s miser displays a series of “anti-holiday” attitudes. He refuses to enjoy any moment in his life even when he does not have to spend anything. If we relate this to the idea of social participation, then we see how through use of exaggeration and the comic mode, **Plautus** comments on the people obsessed with concerns of wealth. Therefore, such people are unable to enjoy anything at all. However, as pointed out by **Segal**, *Euclio*, unlike other agelasts is finally well integrated into the society. We must remember that this only happens once he is rid of the pot of gold.

David Konstan in “Social themes in *Aulularia*” sees figures such as that of the miser as a misanthrope. They remain outside society and due to their obsession sever all ties with the social world. If comedy is seen as an “affirmation to community” then the play is also about the integration of this misanthrope.

The misanthrope and the miser, on the contrary, have themselves their ties with society. It is they who will not marry or allow their characters to marry, they who will not engage in commerce with their fellows which is the right use of wealth....the miser and the misanthrope, resolve its inner bonds and encyst themselves within society as internal exiles. (308)

Euclio can be seen as this figure of the “internal exile”. He refuses to communicate with anyone in society. He goes to an extreme and rejects the role of the helpful neighbour and instructs *Staphyla* to refuse anything that the neighbours ask for. This is a kind of self-imposed isolation from society. In explaining the role of the citizen in society, **Konstan** explains the “twin principle” on which citizenship was constituted—“*ius connubii et commercii*, the right

of marriage and of commerce”. According to **Konstan** these two ideas form the basis of the relationship between the citizen and the society. Going by this principle both *Euclio* and *Phaedria* remain outside the contract that forms the basis of the society. According to **Konstan**, they are placed outside civilised bounds in a state of violence. *Euclio*, by not engaging in the process of commercial transaction restricts the wealth and makes its use value static. Having been raped, *Phaedria* will not be seen as part of the structure of marriage by the forces in power. They both remain outside the integrative principles of society. The miser soon becomes a misanthrope as he does not participate in any social process. Whenever, he interacts with people it is only to maintain the pretence of being a poor man. **Konstan** sees these two instances in the play as intimately related. According to the critic,

... the rape is the expression in the sphere of sex of the miser’s isolation, just as the theft is its expression in the sphere of property.” (312)

The connections between the pot of gold and *Phaedria*’s pregnant condition have been suggested by **C W Marshall**. The critic states:

In Aulularia, Euclio’s pot of gold possesses a symbolic value that exists because he treasures it disproportionately over his pregnant daughter, Phaedria. In what survives of the play, she does not appear on stage, but is heard giving birth at 691–2. However, when the pot appears at 449, ‘the effect is like the first appearance of an important character which we have been waiting to see’.196 Euclio is shrouding the pot with his cloak, and consequently embodies a pregnant image of his unseen daughter. (71)

Alison Sharrock too sees a kind of duality in the play. This refers to the connections say between the pot of gold and the pot-bellied daughter. Both **Konstan** and **Sharrock** see a duality regarding the loss of gold and the rape of the daughter. So the two situations are closely bound to each other. As the end of the play will testify, it is only when the pot of gold is given away in marriage to *Lyconides*, then both *Euclio* and *Phaedria* become a part of the social processes and there is peace. Dowry is a term we in India are extremely familiar with. Dowry existed even in ancient Europe. Lets’ see what dowry meant then and there (ancient Rome), as opposed to here and in these present time next.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1. Analyse *Euclio* as an “agelast” or a spoilsport in the play.

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4.5 DOWRY, MARKET AND ACQUISITION IN *THE POT OF GOLD*

Marriage is an important issue often taken up in **Plautus**’s comedies. When we analyse *The Pot of Gold*, we must understand that **Plautus**’s presentation of marriage is seemingly simplistic. Beneath this veneer some uneasy questions,

that have a bearing on the Roman sensibility of the times, are raised. The play is based on the rape of *Phaedria* and the theft of the pot of gold. This idea is presented to the audience in the prologue in the speech of the household god, *Lar Familiaris*. According to him, “*An upper-class young man has ravished*” *Phaedria*. The word “ravished” is a euphemism for rape within the comic mode.

In the process of the integration of the miser into society, it is also important to reintegrate, *Phaedria* within marriage. The two ideas are closely linked and it is imperative that both cases be resolved for the play to move towards being a comedy. In the case where even one strand is left hanging the play will cease to be a comedy. Before we understand the critical perspectives marriage in this play, let us look at its construction in Rome. Marriage was a kind of contract and there was a system of dowry in place. There were two systems on which this contract was based—*cum manu* and *sine manu*. In the first kind of contract, the married woman came under the legal guardianship of her husband and shared her dowry with him. She became independent only after his death. In the second case, the married woman continued under the guardianship of her father, even though she shared her dowry with her husband. **Susanna Morton Braund** in “Marriage, Adultery, and Divorce in Roman Comic Drama” explains these ideas thus:

Elisabeth Schuhmann suggests that *Plautus* may be involved in polemic against an increase in marriage *sine manu*, a shift away from traditional marriage *cum manu*, according to which, on her marriage, a woman passed from the legal power of her father or guardian into the jurisdiction, or *manus*, of her husband, and any property she brought to marriage passed to her husband. At this period, more and more marriages were contracted *sine manu*, which left the woman in her father’s power but meant that after his death she was *sui juris* (legally independent, with the proviso that a guardian, or tutor, was appointed—this being fairly notional in some cases) and could own property in her own right. If this is correct, this shift is clearly a diminution of the husband’s power and authority. Not that hostility toward married women owning property in their own right is confined to the ancient world: compare the opposition to the Married Women’s Property Bills of 1857 and 1870. (Smith 50)

Under the seemingly simple comic structure debates and discussions relevant to the time were taken up by **Plautus**. The playwright draws attention towards the discomfort of men in power with any kind of financial fortification of the women in society. If as **Braund** elaborates, there was a shift to a system of marriage that kept the woman relatively free from the control of the husband, one can sense disquiet as expressed by *Megadorus* especially with respect to “dowried” women. His comments on dowry and marriage put forth the anxieties of the husband who is resentful of a somewhat strong partner. Further as **Konstan** points out there is also the repealment of the *lex oppi* in the backdrop. **Paul B Harvey Jr.** explains the law of *Lex Oppia* in detail, in the context of the historicity and attempts to date specific plays. In the context of *the Pot of Gold*, the critic states:

Many have argued that the *Aulularia* should be dated to 195 or shortly thereafter, because this play contains allusions to the debate on *lex Oppia* held that year. That suputory law passed in 215 and repealed in 195, forbade Roman women from conspicuous display in the form of multicoloured garments (construed in most ancient sources as purple), extravagant gold jewellery and transport. (300)

The critic points out that this may not be “coherent evidence” for the drama’s date. For the purpose of discussion, however, the understanding of the debate around women and their finances is enlightening. The *lex Oppia* was a law that sought to control the display of wealth by women. However against the backdrop of the *Punic* wars and rising prosperity, this show of affluence became important. The repealment of this law, affirming display as financial assertion, must have led to the chagrin of husbands who could no longer control the extravagant ways of the dowried women. *Megadorus*’s speech expresses these concerns.

This show of riches is to be read in tandem with the presence of a group of people who now facilitate this display. They provide new items to lure the attention of the upper class and provide for their own existence. The *Pot of Gold* gives us a glimpse into these people in Roman society. In terms of social composition, the people are not just from two broad groups of the rich and the poor. The Plautine world presents a wider and more colourful social canvas. This group comprises the “jeweller”, “embroider”, “violet-dyer”, “sandal maker” and so on. These workers must have been there but in a country increasingly powerful and subject to cross-cultural encounters there is a new kind of market mobility that emerges. We can deduce two important factors regarding the social composition of the times. Firstly, in the play, we encounter a society making a marked shift from a stark and austere one to an acquisitive one. The Roman habit of not spending, no longer holds ground against a group of people who are introducing new commodities. The women take to this group of workers who present to them fabric in purple and gold indicating desire for more commodities. Secondly, this increase in the purchasing power of women disturbs the men who can no longer exercise control over the finances of the upper class women.

Having understood the implications of dowry and display of wealth, there is another functional aspect to the system of dowry as pointed out by **David Konstan** He sees it as a measure of integration in society. This is the reason that the pot of gold must eventually be given to *Lyconides* for *Phaedria*’s social well-being. But the critic also explains how dowry is now a marker of wealth wherein it is now equated with money.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1. What do you understand of the institution of marriage and the system of dowry in *The Pot of Gold*?

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4.6 ENDING OF THE POT OF GOLD

Throughout the play, *Euclio* never bonds with any other character in the play. He alienates himself from all. But the audience is privy to all his secrets and plans. When he loses his gold, *Euclio* pleads to the audience to tell him of the whereabouts of his treasured possession. **Timothy Moore** points out how *Euclio*'s only touch with humanity in any real sense is the audience:

*Euclio's most conspicuous characteristic, after his obsession with the gold, is his alienation! Euclio does, however, have one human connection: the audience. He tries to establish rapport with the spectators almost immediately, complaining to them that Staphyla walks too slowly (46-47) and responding with an aside when Staphyla murmurs under her breath (52)...Despairing of help from the audience as a whole, Euclio appeals to an individual spectator. With the failure of this attempt to find at least one ally in the audience, Euclio's mood changes from hysteria to despondency, and he begins to recognize that his obsession with the gold caused him to deprive himself to no avail. Euclio has slowly begun the progression that will lead to his awareness in the play's last scenes that the gold brought him only trouble (frags. 3-4). This recognition of his own failure is directly connected, with Euclio's alienation from the audience. At the same time that he acknowledges that he cheated himself, he says that others (Alu, 725) gain pleasure in his situation. Those others are the spectators. Euclio refers to them in the third person, for his rapport with them is gone. In *Aulularia*, then, Plautus uses Euclio's rapport with the audience to reinforce his association between the miser's gold and his alienation. He establishes through staging that Euclio is completely alienated from all other characters onstage, but he arranges his monologues and asides so that Euclio has one human connection, the audience. That connection revolves around Euclio's obsession with his gold, for in almost all his monologues and asides he talks about his fears for the gold or his miserliness. When the gold is threatened, Euclio's relationship with the audience also begins to fade; and when the gold disappears, so does Euclio's rapport with the spectators. The audience can thus appreciate Euclio's alienation, and they can feel personally involved in his conversion. (44, 47)*

The end of the play brings the duality in the play to a close as both issues are resolved together. *Lyconides* approaches *Euclio* to own up to his 'mistake' of having raped *Phaedria* and the miser momentarily confronts the "cataclysmic" situation. He is informed of *Phaedria*'s renunciation by *Megadorus* and of *Lyconides*'s decision to marry her. One can see that *Phaedria* has no control over the turn of events. As *Euclio* sees the reality of the situation, his attention is momentarily deflected from the loss of the pot of gold. But he soon comes back to it and tells *Lyconides* to share information on the gold.

In the final scene after which the manuscript breaks off, *Lyconides* confronts his slave, *Strobilus* who has confessed to the theft and desires his freedom. One can see that freedom was the dream of every slave who would be willing to trade the gold with his master for it. But getting to know of his slave's deed,

Lyconides demands the gold. *Strobilus*'s denial is of little use, as *Lyconides* is positive about the theft. The pot of gold that remains at the centre of the play acquires new meaning. Where it marks *Euclio* as a miser, its possession by *Strobilus* indicates its power to buy the slave his freedom. As against the miser who obsesses over it, the slave seeks freedom by quickly wanting to part with it. A failure to transact the gold for freedom indicates *Strobilus*'s continued oppression as a slave. According to **Graham Ley** in "A material world: costumes, properties and scenic effects":

The material world is present in abundance in Plautus' comedies, in allusions to the marketplace, the possessions of the household, the interior of the house and its walls, and the enticements of food and dining. What we actually see is only a selection, and at times even a central 'property', such as the pot of gold in the play of that title, may remain hidden from us. But just as slaves are an object of fascination for Plautus and his audience, in the fantastic licence allowed to them, so the material objects that symbolized their oppression are constantly cited. (McDonald 282-3)

The gold indicates the subordination of the slave who otherwise has no access to freedom. *Lyconides*'s demand for the gold to restore it to its owner, his father-in-law, ratifies *Lyconides*'s assertion as master. He acts on the side of the people in power and demands his own. As **Sharrock** states:

But it is ultimately what brings Lyconides into his right social role. In the next scene, Lyconides is no longer the snivelling youth, but is now the authoritative master. When his slave tells him about the theft of the pot of gold, he responds in unconscious echo of his prospective father-in-law: quod ego facinus audio ex te? (822), and demands the pot's return in a way that would make Euclio proud. The parallelism between Lyconides and Euclio is both comic and socially meaningful. (201)

At the end of the day, a comedy is as **Konstan** explains, about affirmation. This necessitates an inclusive approach so that the people alienated from society are restored to it. Where we don't know what else happens in the play the last available line, "I never had a moment's peace—not day or night. Now I can rest." suggests that the gold was given to *Lyconides* in marriage. As **Konstan** explains this is a stroke that resolves both issues. The gold is restored to the structure of economy and *Phaedria* is brought within the fold of normative society through the institution of marriage.

Check Your Progress 4

1. Do you think *Euclio* is finally integrated in society? Give reasons for your answer.

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4.7 LET US SUM UP

This unit has brought together various critical aspects of the play that will enable an in-depth understanding of the characters and issues. *Euclio* is discussed as the spoilsport who is finally integrated into society. The system of dowry is understood against the repealment of the *lex Oppia*, reflecting on the changing position of women in society. *Phaedria*'s situation as a woman who has been raped and eventually integrated into society through marriage is analysed. The social composition presented in the play goes beyond a simple understanding of it in terms of masters and slaves. A new group of people related to a subtly changing acquisitive economy can be seen. Finally, like in most plays by **Plautus** the assertions by the slaves give us a window into their thoughts and aspirations and give us a more inclusive picture of Roman society of the times.

4.8 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. Read section 4.2.1

Check Your Progress 2

1. Read section 4.3

Check Your Progress 3

1. Read section 4.4

Check Your Progress 4

1. Read section 4.5
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4.9 GLOSSARY

fabulae palliatae : A conventional name that indicated such plays that had been adapted from Greek originals, and distinguished the repertory of comedies with Greek characters, costumes, and subject matter. (Harrison 130)

fabulae togatae : Literally means plays dressed in a toga. Comedies normally set in Rome or Italy and composed mainly in the second century BC by Titinius and Afranius. 'Toga-clad' comedies in general were not as popular as 'Greek-cloaked' plays, which dominated the Roman stage for at least two centuries; even these, however, were eventually upstaged by the low theatre of the 'mime' (*mimus*), a form of entertainment (Harrison 130)

Greek New Comedy: It was a type of five-act drama cultivated mainly after the death of Alexander the Great (323 BC); although it shared structural and thematic motifs with earlier periods of Greek comedy, it differed from them in its chorus. (Harrison 131)

Metatheatre : The idea of a play reflecting on itself.

Dowry : It refers to the financial assets or good a woman carries with her in marriage. These are shared with the husband. For the most the husband has more or less complete control over the finances of his wife.

Ravish : to seize by violence

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Articles

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