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The *Pot of Gold at the End of the Play*

When Eckard Lefèvre (*Ktema* 22 [1997]: 227-35) argues that Molière's *L'Avare* serves as a better guide to the Greek original of Plautus' *Aulularia* than the surviving play, he stands for a position other scholars implicitly assume. Especially when dealing with the lost ending of Plautus' play, scholars do not always realize how historically contingent their initial assumptions about the *Aulularia* are. This paper surveys endings composed for the *Aulularia* since antiquity, to show how contemporary aesthetic and literary assumptions shape scholarly beliefs about the play's proper ending.

Supplements to and adaptations of the *Aulularia* involve one or more of three actions to resolve the plot: (1) the miser consents to the marriage of his daughter with the young man (2) the miser, after recovering his treasure, turns some or all of it over to the young couple and (3) the thief of the miser's treasure is dealt with. Characters in the play may discourse on a theme related to one of the three components: (1) married life (2) the problems associated with wealth, and (3) the proper fate of the thief after the treasure is returned.

The ancient arguments to the play inform us that in Plautus, Euclio does consent to the marriage and gives the pot of gold to Lyconides. We do not know the fate of the thieving slave nor whether there was any debate or sermonizing. The five isolated single line fragments from the end do not explicitly refer to the events or any of the debate topics.

The fifth century CE *Querolus*, both remake and sequel to Plautus' *Aulularia*, ends during a debate which emphasizes the paradox of the thief returning the treasure. Vital of Blois' verse adaptation of the play in the twelfth century also emphasizes the ethical paradox of rewarding the thief for returning the treasure. Supplements to Plautus' original *Aulularia* from the late Medieval and early Renaissance continue the tradition of debating the thief's role in returning the gold. Codrus provides the most elaborately rhetorical of these endings. Under the influence of Codrus, Lorenzino de' Medici ends his *Aridosia* (as does Pierre de Larivey his French version, *Les Esprits*) by involving the miser in debate. In the next century, Molière heightens the old man's miserliness in *L'Avare*. When Thomas Shadwell brought Molière's play to the English stage, he hardened the old man even more (contra Ben Jonson's earlier miser in *The Case Is Altered*, who is noble and generous at the end.)

Molière's influence has led modern scholars to view Plautus' original play as a character study of the miser Euclio. Hypotheses of the lost Greek original hinge on the characterization of Euclio. More recent socio-political readings still place the portrayal of Euclio at their core. While it is easy to consider Euclio's centrality to the *Aulularia* obvious, scholars should be aware that the prominence of the miser character is a relatively recent phase in the reception of the play.