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## Women in Roman Republican Literature: The Use of Mulier in Sallust and Plautus

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**Women in Roman Republican Literature: The Use of *Mulier* in Sallust and Plautus**

by  
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**Classics 490 Honors Thesis**

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## **Introduction**

Language and word choice are critical tools that allow an author to communicate how they want the audience to receive and think about a character or situation. Authors often will use colloquialisms or euphemisms to imply something about the characters that either cannot be said or is not appropriate to say. This is especially true of words used for women. There are several Latin words meaning ‘woman’ or ‘female’. In this chapter I focus on the most common three: *mulier*, *femina* and *puella*. Because these terms can implicitly comment upon the social positions of characters, their fundamental meanings are foundational to my ultimate argument that Plautus and Sallust use terms for women in significant and marked ways.

### **Mulier**

*Mulier* is a Latin word with the most essential meaning ‘female’. Moreover, it indicates a female who has reached maturity but does not necessarily indicate a sexually experienced or promiscuous woman<sup>1</sup>. *Mulier* is most often used in opposition to *vir* (‘man’). According to J. N. Adams, this juxtaposition is found “11 times in Plautus, once in Cato, 17 times in Varro, about 12 times in the speeches of Cicero, twice in the philosophica, and twice in Sallust.”<sup>2</sup> Republican prose and comedy authors almost exclusively use *mulier* to emphasize the sex of a woman (both explicitly and implied)<sup>3</sup>. Although *mulier* does indeed simply mean ‘woman,’ I show that in some contexts it implies sexual promiscuity, to the point where it becomes a euphemism for ‘whore’. It is important to remember that this

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<sup>1</sup> Adams, J.N. “Words for ‘Prostitute’ in Latin.” *Rheinisches Museum Für Philologie, Neue Folge*, 126. Bd. H. ¾, pp. 321-358. 1983. pp. 345, footnote 70.

<sup>2</sup> Adams, J.N. “Latin Words for ‘Woman’ and ‘Wife.’” *Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. Gollata*, 50. Bd. 3/4. H. pp. 234-255. 1972. pp. 242.

<sup>3</sup> Adams (1972), 242.

term can be ascribed to a woman regardless of whether she is actually promiscuous or people just think she might be<sup>4</sup>.

While there are many euphemisms and terms for prostitutes or promiscuous women, Petronius's *mulier secutuleia* is worth noting.

*Tamquam mulier secutuleia unius noctis tactu omnia vendidit (Satyricon, 81.5)*

He [Giton] sold all he had for a one-night stand like a *mulier secutuleia*.

This sentence comes toward the end of chapter eighty-one when Petronius is talking about the adventures of Encolpius and his companions. Encolpius had just left the lodging-house where he was staying and snuck off the seashore where he stayed for three days. He is lamenting about his loneliness since his boyfriend, Giton, has left him for another man. There is some debate about this because the context does not make a lot of sense<sup>5</sup>. The sentence translates to something along the lines of: "he sold all he had for a one-night stand like a *mulier secutuleia*" and many of scholars believe that this phrase translates to 'prostitute'<sup>6</sup>. The issue is that prostitutes are not the ones paying for sex in a typical transactional relationship, the men are. Because of this, the argument that this phrase means 'prostitute' does not make sense. I think the stronger argument is that a *mulier secutuleia* is not a prostitute, but instead a woman who is so desperate for sex that she is willing to pay for it. This usage of *mulier* illustrates the connections between perceived sexual misconduct, 'whores' and the term *mulier* itself.

### Femina

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<sup>4</sup> Because of the way she acts, talks, dresses, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Adams (1983), 335.

<sup>6</sup> Williams, Craig A., "Greek Love at Rome." *The Classical Quarterly* 45, no. 2. 1995. pp. 41-42.

*Femina* is the most common word for ‘woman’ in Latin. It is used both attributively and substantively and is placed in opposition to *masculus* or *mas*<sup>7</sup>. In Latin *femina* tends to be a rather respectful term<sup>8</sup> and is typically applied to a woman of moral or social distinction. This is seen particularly in Republican prose, where it denotes a, ‘good woman’ or ‘moral woman’<sup>9</sup>. When *femina* is used thus, it is often accompanied by a laudatory adjective, but occasionally it is used independently.<sup>10</sup> Despite its predominantly positive moral implications, there are some examples where it is used ironically in a derogatory epithet to designate an upper-class woman who is not behaving the way a ‘good’ Roman *femina* should.<sup>11</sup>

Scholars argue that *femina* is a more respectful term because it is typically used to describe upper-class women, especially in upper-class speech. This point is hit home by its use in later Latin. In Ecclesiastical Latin, *femina* becomes the most popular word to describe nuns, implying that it is the most respectful term to use. This is clear in the *Leges Liutprandi*, where a nun is separated from both *mulier* and *puella*:

*Si quis mulierem aut puellam aut religiosa femina, quae in alterius mundium est, in sacramento mittere presumpserit. (Leges Liutprandi, 93)*

If any woman is devout, one who has been formally betrothed for marriage, she must not dare send a *mulier* or a *puella* into the sacraments.

*Femina* is preferred by most poets and is used as a neutral word for ‘woman’ from the Augustan period on and it was *roughly* synonymous with *mulier*.<sup>12</sup> It was considered more appropriate in poetry because of its respectful and dignified tone. Axelson argues that

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<sup>7</sup> See TLL VI. 1.458. 9 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Plautus, *Aul.* 135; Cicero, *Phil.* 3.16; Pliny, *Epist.* 6.33.2.

<sup>9</sup> Adams (1972), 234-235.

<sup>10</sup> Adams (1972), 236.

<sup>11</sup> This is how Plautus likes to use it.

<sup>12</sup> Adams (1972), 239.

this led to the increased usage of *femina* in early imperial prose like Seneca and Tacitus. Adams disagrees, and argues that the main reason that *femina* was getting used by more authors was because of the “encroachment upon the emphatic function of *mulier*,” not because of the influence of poetry.<sup>13</sup> This progression shows that as *mulier* became more negative, *femina* became more common. As a result, authors began to select terms based upon what they wanted to imply about a person or situation

### *Puella*

*Puella* is traditionally the word for ‘girl,’ but when applied to a woman it can be deteriorative in meaning and can take on various levels of sexual signification in some contexts. This is clear in some later authors like Catullus and Martial. Catullus uses *puella* at times when he describes Lesbia. He also uses it when he describes older prostitutes or more generally, promiscuous women that are older<sup>14</sup>. Martial mostly uses *puella* as a way to describe younger women, but in a few places, he uses it to imply that they are sexually experienced young women or prostitutes<sup>15</sup>. He then also uses it to describe virgins<sup>16</sup>, models of chastity<sup>17</sup>, and a girlfriend<sup>18</sup>. The denegation of *puella* is in no way total nor comparable to that of *mulier*; however, it seems to be less neutral and slightly more suggestive than just ‘girl’.

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<sup>13</sup> Adams (1972), 239, n. 48.

<sup>14</sup> Adams (1983), 347, n. 76.

<sup>15</sup> Martial 4.71.2, 7.30.7, 11.16.8, 11.81.2, 12.55.1.

<sup>16</sup> Martial 5.2.8.

<sup>17</sup> Martial 7.88.4, 9.90.8.

<sup>18</sup> Martial 3.11.1.



Plautus uses *puella* in reference to slave girls and small female children, making sure to stress their youth<sup>19</sup>. One of the most pertinent examples of this is in *Casina*, in lines 47-49 when he mentions a slave girl:

*Postquam ea adoleuit ad eam aetatem ut uiris placere posset, eam puellam hic senex amat efflictim, et item contra filius. (Casina, 47-49)*

After she reached such an age that she could attract men's attention, this old man fell madly in love with her, and, in opposition to him, his son did so too.

There are a few noteworthy elements in this passage. The first is this predatory nature of the old man. He has waited till this girl has reached an age at which she can have sex, and is now madly 'in love' (*amat efflictim*) with her. The second is Plautus's use of *amat*. This is not the only place he uses it,<sup>20</sup> and based on the context it is reasonable to assume it means more that the man is experiencing lust or some kind of sexual desire rather than traditional love. The sexual version of *puella* is generally used in reference to slaves, while *mulier*, as I shall show in greater detail in subsequent chapters, is used of sexually promiscuous free women.

### Roman women and Roman Society

The political position of Roman women was that of complete subjugation, but the social position was more complex. While socially they were still not allowed many rights, the Roman matron was both respected and influential<sup>21</sup>. The Roman matron was the absolute mistress of the house. She oversaw all household activities and slaves. She would mingle with other members of the family (in the house) and share meals with her husband,

<sup>19</sup> It is used the most in *Cistellaria* (11 times) but also used twice in *Casina* (41 and 79), *Curculio*. (528), *Truculentus*. (404).

<sup>20</sup> I will touch on this more later.

<sup>21</sup> C.f. James Bryce-- "one can hardly imagine a more absolute subjection of one person to another who was nevertheless not only free but respected and influential as we know the wife in old Rome was" via Wieand.

but she would never recline or drink wine. With the permission of her husband she could attend performances in the theater and attend banquets outside of the house. This is interesting because the Roman matron was respected and trusted, yet had no legal rights and was viewed as her husband's property by the state<sup>22</sup>.

Willystine Goodsell, in her book *A History of the Family as a Social and Educational Institution*, divides the continuance of the family as a social unit in Rome into two periods: the founding of the city to the end of the Punic Wars, and then from the end of the Punic Wars to the end of the empire. During the first period, the ideals of family life were very rigid and more similar to those in fifth-century Athens. Romans viewed the family as a religious, legal, and economic unit formed under the patriarch. The *pater familias* was the only person recognized by the law in terms of legal rights and religious authority. He was also the sole owner of the family property, and therefore controlled all of the family finances. When a woman married, she was handed over from her father to her husband. That means that he could sell her labor and/or person, kill her for adultery or surrender her to a plaintiff who brought a civil suit against him. Though, if a man sold his wife he would certainly be in danger of issues with his in-laws and almost certainly face social repercussions, it was still in his power to do so. So while her position was still more honored and influential than an Athenian woman, a Roman woman's life was still dictated by men.

Goodsell uses the Punic Wars as a turning point because there was a large number of men who were absent from Rome, which meant that women had the opportunity to

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<sup>22</sup> Wieand, Helen E., "The Position of Women in the Late Roman Republic: Part 1," *The Classical Journal* 12, no. 6 (March 1917).

develop their abilities and assert their individuality<sup>23</sup>. Men were not only absent, but by the end of the wars there was a shortage of men because so many had died in battle. In the first Punic War, around 400,000 men died<sup>24</sup>, and in the Second, 770, 000 are estimated to have died<sup>25</sup>. The women of Rome capitalized on this opportunity and as a result their social and economic importance increased drastically. The other reason that the Punic Wars were a turning point was because Rome's wealth had increased, which enabled men to give much larger dowries to their daughters when they were married. This seems like it would have been a good thing; however, it made fathers much more reluctant to hand over such large parts of their property to his daughter's new husband's control<sup>26</sup>.

After the last Punic War, the rigid family ideals began to relax a little. Goodsell attributes this to two things. The first is the development and influence of Christianity under the empire. The second is the influx of Greek culture into the Republic post-war. The growing power of Greek culture helped create conditions that would allow women like Clodia and Sempronia to thrive. The steady deterioration of the model of the ancient family was due, at least in part, to the widespread decline of moral standard following Rome's war of conquest the continued past the end of the last Punic War<sup>27</sup>. The quest to be the largest, most powerful and most wealthy empire the world had ever seen led the people to prioritize the attainment of wealth as the most essential thing in society, instead of family.

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<sup>23</sup> This is very similar to what happened during and after World War I in the United States.

<sup>24</sup> Gabriel, Richard A., *The Culture of War: Invention and Early Development*. Praeger. April 23, 1990. pp. 110-111.

<sup>25</sup> Dodge, Theodore Ayrault., *Hannibal: A History of the Art of War Among the Carthaginians and Romans*. Houghton, Mifflin and Company. 1891. pp. 610-611.

<sup>26</sup> Goodsell, Willystine. *A History of the Family as Social and Educational Institution*. The MacMillan Company. 1920.

<sup>27</sup> Goodsell (1920).

Sallust laments this quest for wealth as one of the key reasons for the decline of morality in Roman society.

The social reality of Roman women seems to be at odds with how they are represented in Latin literature. Here they largely fit into two categories: the victims of something horrible and the women of fantasy. Roman authors use women getting killed or stepping in the way of something as a way to show change in their stories and therefore such women serve as symbols or catalysts for changes in Rome. This is most obvious in the story of the Sabine women<sup>28</sup>, where they injected themselves into battle to stop a war, and in the “Rape of Lucretia”<sup>29</sup>. In these stories, women suffer because of the immoral conditions fostered by their current climates, and their suffering or action serves to inspire a change which shifts society to a better moral order. The second category of women in Roman literature is this erotic and oversexualized ‘bad’ woman, who are often explicitly prostitutes. These are the most interesting, because the authors act like this is such a heinous and horrible profession but, in reality, prostitution in ancient Rome was common. We see this reflected in the terms that the authors choose to use when describing these women. The difference between a woman who is a *femina* or a *mulier* seems to be one based on morality. As i will show in my studies of the way Plautus and Sallust use *mulier*, this difference can be related to a woman’s attitude towards sex, or reflective of behavior to which men object.

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<sup>28</sup> See Livy 1.9-13 for the most popular version of this story.

<sup>29</sup> See Livy 3.44-49 for the most popular version of this story.

## **Chapter 1: The use of *mulier* in Sallust**

Gaius Sallustius Crispus (Sallust) was born in 86 BC at Amiternum, a town in the Sabine territory, fifty-five miles northeast of Rome<sup>30</sup>. He was born a plebian<sup>31</sup> but seems to have received a thorough education which included Greek. We know little about his early life, except that he was in Rome during a time of political turmoil and witnessed Cataline's conspiracy in 63 BC. He also witnessed the aftermath of the conspiracy and the later formation of the first triumvirate. In terms of reliable information about his early life, all we know is that he was a tribune in 52 BC, which was the same year that he stirred up the plebeians against Milo, who murdered Claudius and whom Cicero defended. In 50 BC, he was identified as one of Caesar's adherents and was expelled from the senate by Appius Claudius Pulcher, who accused him of immorality<sup>32</sup>. Most agree that this accusation was just a cover and that the real story is that he was expelled because of his involvement in the events of 52 BC and his immense political connections<sup>33</sup>. In 49 BC, he commanded a legion and joined Caesar's side in the civil war against Pompey. He was eventually made praetor in 46 BC and his seat in the senate was restored. He then accompanied Caesar on his Africa campaign, which earned him the appointment as proconsular governor of northern Africa. According to Cassius Dio, Sallust pillaged the province and, when he returned to Rome in 45 BC, he was charged with extortion, escaping only with Caesar's intercession<sup>34</sup>. In 44 BC he withdrew from public life and focused on writing and the study of history.

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<sup>30</sup> Henderson, Jeffrey. *Sallust: Introduction*. Great Britain. Loeb Classical Library. 1921.

<sup>31</sup> We know this because he held office of the tribune of the commons.

<sup>32</sup> There does not seem to be much evidence or explanation of this accusation. C.f. Henderson.

<sup>33</sup> Balmaceda, Catalina; Comber, Michael. *Sallust: The War Against Jugurtha*. Oxbow Books. 2009. pp. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Cassius Dio, 43.9.2.

He wrote three major works: the *Bellum Catalinae* (BC), the *Bellum Jugurthinum* (BJ) and the *Histories* (H). Today we have almost all of the BC and BJ but only four complete speeches and two letters from H, there are a few fragments from other things they are not securely attributed to him. In Sallust's writing generally, but especially in these three works, virtue seems to be an overarching theme, and more specifically the decline of traditional virtue. I argue that the decline of traditional virtue is represented in part by Sallust's use of the term *mulier* to describe women.

### *Bellum Catalinae*

The *Bellum Catalinae* (BC) is a historical monograph that tells the story of the conspiracy of Cataline, mounted in 63 BC<sup>35</sup>. Cataline and his coconspirators tried to overthrow the consuls because Cataline lost the election to Cicero and Gaius Antonius Hybrida. The BC is assumed to be Sallust's first work because it begins with an unusually long preface where he talks about the challenges of writing history<sup>36</sup> and an account of his personal political career<sup>37</sup>. He starts the BC with sweeping comments about the moral decline of the state, even when he is talking about his own political career. This introduction sets the tone for the rest of the work, which seems on the surface like a first-hand account of the events of Cataline's conspiracy. However, when read critically, it becomes apparent that it is a commentary on the declining morals of society set against the backdrop of history. He starts the BC with a description of the 'beginning of kings', when men were still living their lives without greed and everyone was content with their own

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<sup>35</sup> Woodman, A.J., *Sallust: Cataline's War, The Jugurthine War, Histories*. The Penguin Group. London, England. 2007. pp. vii- xliii.

<sup>36</sup> BC 1.1-3.2, 8.2-4.

<sup>37</sup> BC 3.3-4.2.

possessions<sup>38</sup>. He goes on to say that once the Spartans and the Athenians began to subdue cities and use their *lubidinem dominandi* (lust of domination) as their justification for war, societies started to equate glory with having the greatest empire and things started to shift<sup>39</sup>. Additionally, Sallust emphasizes the fact that nations need to have intelligent leaders in order to maintain sovereignty. He argues that success in agriculture, navigation and building depends entirely on the leader's intelligence. The main problem is that, as he says, *multi mortals dediti ventri atque somno indocti incultique vitam sicuti peregrinantes transiere*<sup>40</sup> (yet many men, being slaves to appetite and sleep, have passed through life untaught and untrained). He goes on to say that mortals have let their bodies become a source of pleasure and their intellect a burden, which is contrary to nature's intent<sup>41</sup>.

One of the ways he perpetuates this theme throughout the work is in the way that he describes the women he mentions. He consistently uses the term *mulier* instead of a more common word like *femina* when talking about women. This could simply be a personal choice, but I argue that he is drawing on the popular negative associations of *mulier* to show that society has become so immoral that even the women are implicated, and perhaps even to suggest there are no good Roman *femina* left.

#### *Women in the Bellum Catalinae*

The first example of his negative portrayal of women comes in the beginning of the work when he is just talking about the army. He actually does not use *mulier* at all in this

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<sup>38</sup> BC 2.1-2.

<sup>39</sup> BC 2.2.

<sup>40</sup> BC 2.7.

<sup>41</sup> BC 2.9.

section but instead uses *amare*. *Amare* is the infinitive of the verb *amo* which means to love.

He says:

*Ibi primum insuevit exercitus populi Romani amare, potare, signa, tabulas pictas, vasa caelata mirari, ea privatim et publicae rapere, delubra spoliare, sacra profanaque omnia polluere. Igitur ei milites, postquam victoriam adepti sunt, nihil relicui victis fecere. (BC, 11.6)*

Translation: The army of the Roman people first became accustomed to/ indulged in love, drink, statues, paintings and engraved vases, seized them from private houses and public spaces, stripped temples, and to soil everything sacred and profane. Therefore these soldiers, after they had reached victory, left nothing made behind.

Here, as it often does in Latin, *amare* seems to indicate having intercourse rather than the more general “to love”. This lines up with the rest of the context where Sallust is describing Sulla’s army taking lands by force and robbing and pillaging them<sup>42</sup>. Additionally, having casual and somewhat reckless sex with strangers is considered another indulgence, like robbing and drinking. He says that Sulla’s desire to have a loyal army lead him to allow his men to conduct themselves with both *luxuriose nimisque liberaliter* (luxury and freedom) during the campaign in Asia<sup>43</sup>. The translation of *amare* can go a step further by implying, via the context, sex with a prostitute and/or rape. This conclusion is easily drawn from two facts: 1) we know that soldiers did not bring their wives when they went on campaign and 2) when armies robbed and pillaged places, they did not just take goods, they also took women.

The first time Sallust uses *mulier* is two sections later;

*Nam quid ea memorem quae nisi eis qui videre nemini credibilia sunt, a privatis compluribus subvorsos montis, maria constrata esse? Quibus mihi videntur ludibrio fuisse divitiae; quippe quas honeste habere licebat abuti per turpitudinem properabant. Sed lubido stupri, ganeae ceterique cultus non minor incusserat: viri muliebria pati, mulieres pudicitiam in propatulo habere; vescendi causa terra marique*

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<sup>42</sup> BC 11.4.

<sup>43</sup> BC 11.5.



*omnia exquirere... animus inbutus malis artibus haud facile libidinibus carebat; eo profusius omnibus modis quaestui atque sumptui deditus erat. (BC, 13.1-3, 5)*

For why should I mention those displays of extravagance, which can be believed by none but those who have seen them, as private men have leveled the mountains and built upon the seas? For whom, it seems to me, wealth was a mere plaything; you see, in what manner they were permitted to have been honored, they hastened to spend it through foulness. But the desire for dishonor, gluttony, and for other wantonness was equally strong: men endured being made womanly, women offered their chastity for sale; to feed their desires they sought all lands and seas... their minds, soaked with evil, by no means easily went without the pleasure of flesh; for this reason, their spirit was more immoderately given up to every means of gain as well as extravagance.

This description of the displays and uses of wealth in Rome, under Sulla's regime, so closely paired with the use of *mulier* enables the reader to make the connection that women were one of the luxuries that they enjoyed. However, there remain a number of ways to interpret Sallust's exact meaning. The statement *mulieres pudicitiam in propatulo habere* seems to reinforce the point that the *mulieres* are not regular women, but prostitutes. Or, perhaps more interesting, he could be trying to emphasize that regular women, who were not prostitutes, were becoming prostitutes. This means that he is zeroing in on the singular moment that a woman loses all claim to the virtue that she once had. It could be understood that the reader is also meant to make the connection between the *ludibrio* and the *mulieres*, which would imply that the women are playthings and are objects of wealth as well. Lastly, *stupri* means the dishonor that comes from lewdness or lust. If *stupri* is translated as 'lust,' this furthers the point that an element of this luxury is prostitutes or women with no or few sexual morals. This explains the use of *mulier* instead of *femina*, which would be out of place in an amoral context. This could also be Sallust trying to muddle the lines between a regular woman and a prostitute. By using *mulier* it can act as an intentional way to confuse the reader about what he is talking about (women or

prostitutes). If it is understood in this way, then it connects to Sallust's original goal, which was to comment on the moral situation of the Republic. He is trying to show that society's morals have become so blurred that people cannot even tell the difference between a regular woman and a prostitute.

Several sections later, Sallust uses *mulier* generally again, in a much different tone. This comes right after Sallust was describing how the citizens of Rome were struck with alarm because of the rumors swirling about the conspiracy.

*ad hoc mulieres, quibus rei publicae magnitudine belli timor insolitus incesserat, adflictare sese, manus supplices ad caelum tendere, miserari parvos liberos, rogitare omnia, <omni rumore>, pavere, <adripere omnia>, superbia atque deliciis omissis, sibi patriaeque diffidere. (BC, 31.3)*

Moreover, the women, whom the magnitude of the empire shielded from the fear of war, were anxious, stretched their suppliant hands to heaven, mourned over their small children (infants), questioned everything, were struck with fear by every rumor, forgot their pride and pleasures, and felt nothing but distrust for themselves and their country.

Here we must ask if *mulier* is meant to refer generally to all women, or to prostitutes. There are two ways to take this change in usage: Sallust could either be trying to use traditional gender roles, as a way to set up a contrast, or he could be saying that things have gotten so bad that even the prostitutes are scared. By presenting the woman as weak, helpless and scared he could be trying to set up a contrast between how he thinks women should act and how the women of his story have acted thus far. This usage is an example of him using the traditional conception of women as a way to highlight the differences between the women he mentions and the 'good' or 'normal' Roman woman. However, I am more inclined to believe that he is trying to connect the two ideas as a way to showcase how bad the social atmosphere in Rome actually is during this time (or how bad he thinks it is). This also seems to be more in line with Sallust's general description of how the social order in

Rome is falling apart because of the constant quest for wealth. By making the point that even the prostitutes are scared, a group of people that are the least respected in Roman society, he is laying out how this problem has penetrated society at every level. Here Sallust changes the usage of *mulier* to emphasize how bad things have gotten in Rome but also as a way to foreshadow how Cataline's hearing in the senate goes.<sup>44</sup>

### *The Women in Cataline's Conspiracy*

Sallust describes the men in Cataline's conspiracy as being no more noble than Cataline. In chapter five, Sallust takes a somewhat random break from the story to highlight how Cataline, though he was a man of noble birth, was of a vicious and depraved disposition. He goes on to list some of the transgressions of his younger years, such as robbery and sedition. Additionally, he points out that Cataline was a liar and he was jealous of other men's property. Sallust describes the women in Cataline's conspiracy in an equally unflattering light. These unflattering descriptions are most prominent in two places. In the first he says:

*ea tempestate plurimos cuiusque generis homines adscivisse sibi dicitur, mulieres etiam aliquot, quae primo ingentis sumptus stupro corporis toleraverant, post, ubi aetas tantummodod quaestui neque luxuriate modum fecerat, aes alienum grande conflaverant. (BC, 24.3)*

At the same time he [Cataline] is said to have attached to his cause great numbers of men, and some women, who in their earlier days had supported a luxurious life by the defilement of their bodies, but who, when age had lessened their gains but not extravagance, contracted grand debts.

This is a very unflattering description of the women who follow Cataline. Sallust implies that they are ex- prostitutes who are now too old to make the amount of money that they did when they were young. As a result, they are now in significant debt, but nonetheless

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<sup>44</sup> BC 31.8.

continue spending the same amount of money. That *mulier* here means ‘prostitute’ instead of ‘women’ clearly highlights how immoral Cataline’s followers are and illustrates the kind of people, in this case women, that Cataline attracts<sup>45</sup>. This jab at Cataline’ and his followers’ characters is another recurring theme,<sup>46</sup> and here Sallust seems to be merging the two main ideas: the moral decline of the Republic and Cataline and his followers lack of morality.

In the next section, Sallust focuses on one woman in Cataline’s conspiracy, Sempronia. Some argue that Sallust uses her as the female counterpart of Cataline, while others suggest that Sallust chooses to highlight her to show how morally weak the conspirators are, thereby further reinforcing the theme of Roman society’s moral decline<sup>47</sup>. Syme, among others<sup>48</sup>, agree that this description of Sempronia parallels the description of Cataline that Sallust gives in section 5 of the BC<sup>49</sup>. The reader meets Sempronia in the course of his discussion of the ex-prostitutes who were a part of the conspiracy (see above). That being said there is no evidence, independent of Sallust-- for the presence of a Sempronia among the conspirators, nor is there any conclusive evidence that she was actually a real person<sup>50</sup>.

Sallust introduces and describes her as:

*Sed in eis erat Sempronia, quae multa saepe virilis audaciae facinora commiserate.  
Haec mulier genere atque forma, praetera viro liberis satis fortunata fuit; litteris*

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<sup>45</sup> Moreover, this usage further supports reading *mulier* elsewhere in the text as referring implicitly or specifically to prostitutes.

<sup>46</sup> BC 5, 31.4

<sup>47</sup> Boyd, Barbara Weiden. “Virtus Effeminata and Sallust’s Sempronia”. *Transactions of the American Philological Association*. Johns Hopkins University Press. Vol. 117, pp. 183-201. 1987. Pages 197-198. She presents both of these points and provides details on the debate.

<sup>48</sup> The others include but are not limited to: Büchner, Early, Tiffou, Vertska, McGushin, and Ramsey

<sup>49</sup> Syme, Ronald, *Sallust*. University of California Press. 1964. pp. 131-134

<sup>50</sup> Syme argues that Sempronia is the sister of the Sempronia Tuditani filia who was the mother of Fulvia but no one is really sure.

*Graecis et Latinis docta, psallere, saltare elegantius quam necesse est probae, multa alia, quae instrumenta luxuriate sunt. Sed ei cariora semper omnia quam decus atque pudicitia fuit pecuniae an famae minus parceret haud facile discerneres; libido sic accensa ut saepinus peteret viros quam peteretur. Sed ea saepe antehac fidem prodiderat, creditum abiuraverat, caedis conscia fuerat, luxuria atque inopia praeceps abierat. Verum ingenium eius haud absurdum: posse versus facere, iocum movere, sermone uti vel modesto, vel molli, vel procaci; prorsus multae facetiae multusque lepos inerat. (BC, 25)*

But among these women [who supported Cataline] was Sempronia, who often committed many crimes with masculine daring. This woman in birth and form, in her husband and children was favored by fortune enough; she was skilled in Greek and Latin letters, singing, and dance more elegantly than is necessary for an honest woman, and many others, which were tools of her luxury. But, nothing was less valuable to her than her honor or chastity; you could not easily discern whether she was less sparing of her money or reputation; thus, her desires were so strong that she sought men more often than she was sought by them. But before this she had frequently forfeited her word, defaulted on loans, known about murders, poverty and extravagance had sent her headlong. But her true *ingenium* was by no means harsh: she was able to make verses, move a joke, and could use language which was modest, soft or bold; she possessed a high degree of sarcasm and charm.

This is an interesting passage because Sempronia is described both positively and negatively. Sallust mentions that she is favored by fortune in both her family life and her beauty (*genere atque forma, praetera viro liberis satis fortunata fuit*) and that she is educated (*litteris Graecis et Latinis docta*). He also mentions that she can sing (*psallere*), her *ingenium* is not harsh (*Verum ingenium eius haud absurdum*), she is funny (*iocum movere*), had good use of language (*sermone uti vel modesto, vel molli, vel procaci*) and that she is both sarcastic and charming (*multae facetiae multusque lepos*). Sallust interrupts his positive description of her with several negative characteristics, saying that she often commits crimes with masculine daring (*virilis audaciae facinora commiserate*), that she dances more elegantly than is necessary for an honest women (*saltare elegantius quam necesse est probae*), her honor and chastity meant very little to her (*cariora semper omnia quam decus atque pudicitia*), she was not sparing of money and didn't care about her

reputation (*pecuniae an fama minus parceret*) and that she went after men more than they went after her (*peteret viros quam peteretur*) among other bad characteristics. If Sallust is using Sempronia as a mirror of Cataline, then he completely breaks down how bad Cataline's character truly is, and bookends the list of his bad traits with a list of good traits. This is Sallust's way of getting the audience to recall his famous discussion of Cataline's good and bad traits. Although all of these characteristics do seem to show that there is a severe lack of morality among Cataline's followers, I do not think this gives a good enough explanation of why Sallust decided to include all of the positive things for it to be considered as a possible reason Sallust would discuss Sempronia so thoroughly.

When referring to Sempronia Sallust once again uses the term *mulier*. The relationship of *mulier* to prostitution is especially relevant when looking at this section: *saltare elegantius quam necesse est probae, decus atque pudicitia, pecuniae an fama minus parceret, peteret viros quam peteretur*. All of these phrases seem to have a sexual element that, if closely examined, could lead a reader unfamiliar with the historical Sempronia, to believe that she is a prostitute. The two most interesting points are about the way she dances and that she seeks men before they seek her. By saying that Sempronia dances better than is necessary for an 'honest woman' he is accusing her of being promiscuous, or at least being able to dance in a way that would not be appropriate for a woman of her status. Additionally, by highlighting that she seeks men more often than they seek her, he is asserting that she is sexually aggressive, a role that is traditionally male. By painting her as a masculine woman Sallust returns to the point of the opening sentence (where he asserts that she commits crimes of masculine daring) and also proves that she does not conform to the traditional gender roles of a woman. Here, Sallust is trying to illustrate that the collapse

of traditional gender roles is negative, and more importantly, that something that was once so clearly defined is starting to blur. By implying that one cannot tell the difference between women and men, Sallust, shows a type of moral degradation that was incredibly upsetting to him.

The last woman that Sallust mentions is Aurelia Orestilla, who was Cataline's wife. As with Sempronia-- and the other women that Cataline associates with, Sallust does not paint a particularly flattering picture of her. That being said, she is an outlier. Sallust does not describe her as a *mulier*, but also does not use another word for 'woman', particularly the more positive *femina*. He also devotes less attention to her which implies that she is a less important character than Sempronia. The first time he mentions her he says:

*postremo captus amore Aureliae Orestillae, cuius praeter formam nihil umquam bonus laudavit quod ea nubere illi dubitabat, timens privignum adulta aetate, pro certo creditor necato filio vacuum domum scelestis nuptiis fecisse. (BC, 15.2)*

After this he was captured by love for Aurelia Orestilla, to whom no good man could praise anything but her form, and when she hesitated to marry him, because she was afraid of his adult stepson, it is generally believed that he cleared the house for the criminal marriage by killing his son.

This section is interesting because Sallust highlights how their marriage was *scelestis nupittis* and how *formam nihil umquam bonus laudavit*. He dubs their marriage thus because he was rumored to have killed his wife along with his son as a way to make room for Aurelia. By highlighting that she willingly participated in the marriage it seems that Sallust is attributing some of the blame to her and also seems to criminalize her, as he does with Cataline. So, while he chooses to still discuss her negatively, he does not seem to make the connection between her and a prostitute. This reinforces the argument that Sallust uses the women in the *BC* to illustrate that even the women on the side of Cataline are morally

bankrupt and paints them in a negative light to emphasize that the social structure of the Republic is falling apart and taking the rest of Rome down with it.

He also mentions Aurelia Orestilla at the end of the letter that Cataline supposedly sent Catulus, which Catulus read to the senate<sup>51</sup>. The last line of the letter says:

*Nunc Orestillam commendo tuaeque fidei trado; eam ab iniuria defendas, per liberos tuos rogatus. (BC, 35.6)*

Now I commend and entrust Orestilla to your protection; defend her from injury, being entreated to do so for the sake of your own children.

It should be noted that there is no way to tell if this letter was real or that Sallust just made it up. Given that Catulus and Cataline were friends it is believable that they would have exchanged letters but beyond that there is no way to tell<sup>52</sup>. However, this statement could be taken two different ways. This representation of her as weak might be Sallust's attempt to provide the reader with a comparative case or an exemplar, so that there is something to contrast the other women in the story with. By representing her as a person who is weak and needs protection, he is reflecting traditional gender roles and what a woman is 'supposed' to be. Sallust could also be trying to say that, Aurelia Orestilla is a great woman, at least compared to Sempronia. However, this is unlikely because he seems to already have committed to painting Aurelia Orestilla as a bad person in section fifteen. The alternative is that this letter is Sallust's way of illustrating that Cataline loves her very much, which would be yet another dig at Cataline. It shows that a bad guy (Cataline) loves a bad woman.

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<sup>51</sup> Quinius Lutatius Catulus was a consul in 78 BC and a censor in 65 BC. He was instrumental in suppressing the rebellion raised by Lepidus in 77. He was the leading spokesman of the *optimates* and opposed the commands entrusted to Pompey by the *Lex Gabinia* (67 BC) and the *Lex Manilia* (66 BC). Catulus and Cataline seemed to have been friends for a long time. c.f. Ramsey, 155.

<sup>52</sup> Ramsey (1988).



*Bellum Iugurthinum*

Sallust's *Bellum Iugurthinum*, or the *War Against Jugurtha* was probably published around 40 BC<sup>53</sup> and is a more ambitious historical monograph because of its length and scope. Sallust says that he wanted to write about the war because "it was a long and cruel struggle in which fortune swung from side to side; secondly, because it was then for the first time that a stand was taken against the arrogance of the nobles"<sup>54</sup>. In this work it becomes clear that there is the same underlying theme of moral decline as in BC but it is treated in a more forceful way.

The war against Jugurtha took place after the fall of Carthage in 146 BC in the African provinces. When the king of this province died, the kingdom was divided into three sections: one for each of his sons and one for his nephew Jugurtha (whom the king adopted right before he died). The three brothers were rivals and this rivalry came to head when Jugurtha killed one and defeated the other, Adherbal, who fled to Rome to ask for help. In Rome, the senate decided to send a commission, led by Opimius, to divide the kingdom between the two living heirs. In 116 BC the division was made and Adherbal was given the more fertile land which included Cirta, the capital. Jugurtha received the less promising western territory. Jugurtha quickly attacked and besieged Adherbal at Cirta and eventually killed him. The senate then declared war on Jugurtha and sent an army.

Generally, the text does not focus much on women and as a result Sallust only uses *mulier* in a single section. Nonetheless this is still worth noting. He uses it in the speech that Marius makes to the senate. Marius and Metellus were bitter rivals, and Marius ended up

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<sup>53</sup> Balmaceda, Catalina; Comber, Michael. *Sallust: The War Against Jugurtha*. Oxbow Books. 2009. Pp. 1-26.

<sup>54</sup> *BJ* 5.1.

returning to Rome from Africa to run for consul and won. This led the people to disregard the senate's decision to prolong Metellus's command of the troops on the war front; they instead appointed Marius to succeed him in Africa. The intrusion of the citizens of Rome in matters of war, which up until this moment was regarded as the prerogative of the senate, established a very dangerous political precedent that was followed later by Pompey and Caesar in acquiring their extraordinary armies and had far reaching consequences on the stability of the republic<sup>55</sup>. Marius' speech was given in public as a way for him to recruit plebs to enlist in his army, but it also is a jab at the nobles (whom he never liked nor got along with). In this speech he says:

*Nam ex parente meo et ex aliis sanctis uiris ita accepi, munditias mulieribus, uiris labore conuenire, omnibusque bonis oportere plus gloriae quam diuitiarum esse; arma, non suppellectilem decori esse. (BJ, 85.40)*

For I learned from my father and other upright men that elegance suits a woman, toil a man, that every good man should have more glory than money, and that the only real ornaments are weapons, not furnishings.

Here I think Sallust is trying to draw a comparison between men and women and in doing so reinforces the traditional gender roles that he played with so much in BC. First, he highlights that an upright man is not elegant (*munditias mulieribus*), and he should value glory over money, while a woman is supposed to be elegant and, like furniture, she is an ornament but nothing more. This usage moves away from the idea of prostitution and reduces a woman to only her looks and superficial behavior. It is interesting that the only time he chooses to mention women he reduces them to only their looks and seems to make the point that the importance of women is invested in how pretty she is. Here *mulier* seems

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<sup>55</sup> Balmaceda and Comber, 2009.

to have the basic and more scientific meaning of 'female,' given that it is put in direct comparison to men. However, he does not use *femina* and instead uses the coarser *mulier*, which implies that his judgement applies to all women, not just the morally upright ones that so often imply a member of the upper class.

Although the evidence is not completely conclusive to support that *mulier* always means bad women, there is enough to say that it definitely does not have a positive meaning. Sallust plays on the colloquial meaning of *mulier* so that a Roman reader would understand that the woman he is describing could not possibly be a *femina*. This is made clear by the context that it is used in in both texts. Sallust also makes this clear by the words he uses around *mulier* such as *amat* and *lubrido*. Additionally, this word choice only reinforces his theme that the moral depravity of Rome is causing the Republic to decline.

## **Chapter 2: The use of *mulier* in Plautus**

Our 'information' about Plautus' life is largely based on deduction and the few particulars that we do have which seem to be more fiction than fact<sup>56</sup>. Plautus is thought to have lived from 254-184 BCE and grew up in Sarsina in Umbria<sup>57</sup>. The most suspicious thing about him, though, is his name, Titus Maccus Plautus. It seems to be modeled after the *tria nomina*, which is the form that many prominent Roman families and freedmen in this period used. It translates to 'Phallus son of Clown the Mime-actor'.<sup>58</sup> He most likely adopted this name after he became popular in the Italian theater, which means that he was probably born a slave or a person of lower status. Most scholars say that the construction of his name is where his playwriting career began. This follows with Aulus Gellius' report that he made his money in the 'employment (or service) of stage-artisans',<sup>59</sup> which could signify that he was a stagehand, actor, or even a producer. This agrees with the current view that Plautus 'takes a performer's- eye view of comedy'<sup>60</sup>.

It is also worth noting that Umbria had just recently come under control of Rome when Plautus was born so his native tongue was most likely not Latin. At an early age he moved to Rome where he mastered both that language and Greek<sup>61</sup>. He is rumored to have written 130 comedies, which is most likely an exaggeration, but regardless twenty full(ish) works survive, and we have fragments of one other. Additionally, his works were not purely original. All of them are translation of or adaptations from Greek plays, and he

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<sup>56</sup> Christenson, David, "Grotesque Realism in Plautus' 'Amphitruo'". *The Classical Journal* 96, no. 3 (February-March 2001). pp. 1.

<sup>57</sup> According to Christenson this is most likely an inference drawn from an obscure jest at *Mos. 770*.

<sup>58</sup> Gratwick, A. S., "Titus Maccius Plautus [Titus Maccius Plautus]". *The Classical Quarterly* 23, no.1 (May 1973). Pp. 83.

<sup>59</sup> Gellius 3.3.14, Marples, Morris. "Plautus". *Greece & Rome* 8, no. 22 (October 1938). Pp. 1-2.

<sup>60</sup> Handley (1975), 129.

<sup>61</sup> Marples (1938), 1.

mentions this in a few of his prologues<sup>62</sup>. In some cases, he simply combined parts of Greek plays and added a few of his own scenes<sup>63</sup>. Regardless, he introduced allusions to Roman life and society, which allows him to comment on the state and is why his work is so important<sup>64</sup>.

Plautus was writing during what scholars call the “Middle Republic,” (roughly 400-100 BC). The most notable changes in this period was a dramatic transformation of the physical appearance of the city and a large increase in the population size. These changes were because of the Roman conquest of Italy, an “explosion of violent energy in the period from around 340-270 BC,” and the series of conquests that began the Roman victories in the First and Second Punic Wars<sup>65</sup>. In terms of the social situation in the Middle Republic, the aristocracy started to seek glory and prestige through combat and leadership in war. This meant that they began to see conquest as a means to grow their personal fortunes. Ordinary citizens also gained materially from Rome’s triumphs and, as a result, Romans embraced nearly every opportunity to go to war<sup>66</sup>.

The high point of Plautus’ career was most likely 215-185 BC, which coincides with that of Cato the Elder in Roman political life. In the wake of the Second Punic war, the demand for theatrical performances seems to have increased in Rome. The latter half of Plautus’ career comes after Hannibal was defeated at Zama in 202 BC. The first production

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<sup>62</sup> Marples (1938).

<sup>63</sup> Marples (1938), 2-3.

<sup>64</sup> One of the main examples is in *Aulularia* when Euclio says that he will report Congrio to the *tresviri* which is a distinctly Roman office. Additionally, Roman laws are referred to and the threat of crucifixion, which we see hanging over all the slave’s heads throughout the plays, is distinctly Roman, not Greek.

<sup>65</sup> Cornell, T.J., “Chapter Title: The City of Rome in the Middle Republic (c. 400-100 BC)” in book: *Ancient Rome: The Archaeology of the Eternal City*. Oxbow Books.

<sup>66</sup> Rosenstein, Nathan, “Chapter Title: Introduction: The aristocracy of the middle Republic” in Book: *Rome and the Mediterranean 290 to 146 BC: The Imperial Republic*. Edinburgh University Press.

of *Amphitryo* most likely falls within this period of military expansion<sup>67</sup>. Although difficult to say for certain, several have placed it around 190 BC<sup>68</sup>.

### *Amphitryo*

This is the only one of Plautus' surviving comedies on a mythological subject.

Plautus says that this play is a *tragicomoedia*<sup>69</sup>, or a 'tragic comedy'. Mercury explains this in the prologue when he says:

*Nam me perpetuo facere ut sit comoedia,  
reges quo ueniant et di, non par arbitror.  
quid igitur? Quoniam his seruos quoque partes habet,  
faciam sit, proinde ut dixi, tragicomoedia. (Amphitryo, 60-64)*

I'll make the play a blend-- a tragicomedy; for I don't think it right to make the play a total comedy when kings and gods appear on stage. But then, since slaves have parts to play as well, I'll make it, as I said, a tragicomedy.

The idea of a tragicomedy combines the best of both genres together. From tragedy it takes noble characters, a story which is not historically true but set in a mytho-historic period, heightened effects, and danger. From comedy, it takes humor, modest pleasures, a feigned crisis, an unexpected yet happy ending and, most importantly, comic plotting.<sup>70</sup> So, tragicomedy does not mean just juxtaposing the two genres, but also blending them together in a logical and entertaining way.

The play is centered upon the main character, Amphitryon. According to Greek mythology Amphitryon was the son of Alcaeus, king of Tiryns<sup>71</sup>. He was a general in Thebes

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<sup>67</sup> Christenson (2001), 3.

<sup>68</sup> Sedgwick, W. B. "The History of Latin Comedy". *The Review of English Studies* 3, no. 11 (July 1927). and Duckworth, George E., "Plautus: The Other Nineteen Plays". *The Classical Weekly* 41, no. 6. December 1947.

<sup>69</sup> Plautus, *Amphitryo*, line 51.

<sup>70</sup> Bond, R. P., "Plautus' 'Amphitryo' as a Tragi-Comedy". *Greece and Rome* 46, no. 2. October 1999. pp. 204.

<sup>71</sup> Apollodorus, 2.4.5.

and married Alcmena, who was the daughter of Electryon, king of Mycenae<sup>72</sup>. The only things that are clear about Amphitryon is that he was a Theban general who was away fighting a war. The play starts when he and his slave, Sosia, return home to Thebes after war. While he had been away the god Jupiter had been sleeping with Alcmena, Amphitryon's wife. The twist is that Jupiter wore the guise of Amphitryon, so Alcmena thought that Jupiter had been her husband the whole time<sup>73</sup>. When Jupiter gets word that the real Amphitryon is coming back home, Jupiter (still disguised as Amphitryon) tells Alcmena that he must leave at once to go to war. Jupiter then recruits Mercury to buy him some time by trying to trick the real Amphitryon and his slave Sosia. Mercury then changes to look like Sosia and beats Sosia up when he arrives at the house. The real Sosia goes back to the ship and tells the real Amphitryon what happened. Amphitryon gets annoyed and the next morning he makes his way to the house. When Alcmena sees him, she is confused as to why he is back so soon. This quick confusion turns to anger and jealousy when Amphitryon learns that she slept with another man. After a long argument Jupiter steps in to clarify things and Alcmena miraculously gives birth to twin boys: one is Amphitryon's son and the other is Hercules, son of Jupiter. Jupiter then explains to Amphitryon how he tricked his wife and Amphitryon ends up feeling honored to have shared his wife with a god.

The first time *mulier* is used in this play is in the very beginning of Act 1, Scene 3. At the end of Scene 2 Mercury, disguised as Sosia, tells the audience his plan to stall the real Amphitryon so that Jupiter and Alcmena can have more time together. In the beginning of scene 3, Jupiter and Alcmena come in from the house and say their goodbyes. Jupiter tells

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<sup>72</sup> Apollodorus, 2.4.6-7.

<sup>73</sup> The theme of a mortal receiving an amorous visit from a god disguised as her husband can be traced back to ancient Indian folklore. C.f. Wiley (1973).

Alcmena that he needs to leave to go back to his troops and that he is not leaving because of her. In reality, of course, he is tricking her. Mercury says:

*Nimis his scitust sycophanta, qui quidem meus sit pater. Observatote eum, quam blande muliori palpabitur. (Amphitrvo, 1.3.506-507)*

He's a terribly clever imposter; after all, he's my father. Watch how coaxingly he'll soothe the woman.

Mercury's use of *mulier* in this aside is striking given that two lines later Jupiter says: *Satin habes, si feminarum nulla est quam aequae diligam?* Aren't you satisfied if there's no other woman I love as much? (*Amphitrvo*, 1.3.509). Note the use of *mulier* and then two lines later *femina*. This is significant for two reasons. The first is that when Mercury is speaking to the audience, he is free to use the more derogatory term, *mulier*, to describing Alcmena. However, when Jupiter is speaking directly to Alcmena, he uses the more respectful term, *femina*. The second layer of importance comes in the subject matter. When Mercury mentions how they are going to trick her he uses *mulier*, but when Jupiter is lying to her he uses *femina*. The juxtaposition of the two terms emphasizes the difference in what Mercury really thinks of her, which clearly is not much, and what Jupiter thinks Alcmena will receive well. Alcmena would be upset if she was called a *mulier*, so Jupiter uses a term that, if not flattering, is at least not insulting.

*Mulier* appears again toward the end of the second scene of the second act. The real Amphitryon has just come back and is going to the house to see Alcmena for the first time. At the same time, Jupiter hurries away from the house. Alcmena is understandably confused and asks Amphitryon why he is back so soon. Amphitryon says that he has been at war the whole time and accuses her of having gone crazy. Alcmena insists that she saw



him a little while ago; in response Amphitryon calls her his *delirat uxor* (“mad/crazy wife”) and adds a few lines later:

*Ubi primum, tibi sensisti, mulier, impliciscier? (Amphitruo, 2.2.728)*

When did you first feel this, woman, come on?

The condescending tone of this passage is obvious. Although Alcmena is telling Amphitryon and Sosia what actually happened, they don’t believe her. Using the word *mulier* furthers and reinforces this condescending tone.

In both its appearances in Plautus’s *Amphitryon*, the sense of *mulier* is negative. Obviously, given the context, Alcmena isn’t being called a ‘prostitute’ or worse, but both examples appear in chauvinistic moments. Additionally, the whole premise of the play is that Alcmena was sleeping with a man other than her husband, even if she didn’t know it. By using *mulier*, Plautus’ seems to be playing on the audience’s understanding of it as a colloquialism to communicate that, even though she didn’t know, this is still not how a ‘good’ woman should behave.

### *Menaechmi*

Plautus’s *The Brothers Menaechmus* tells the story of twin boys: Menaechmus and Sosicles. When the boys were seven, their father took Menaechmus to Epidamnus to trade goods, but the boy got lost in the crowd. When their father returned home without Menaechmus, everyone presumed that the boy was dead. Their grandfather then changed Sosicles’ name to Menaechmus. When Sosicles/Menaechmus gets older, he made it his mission to find the original Menaechmus, which leads him and his slave—Messenio—to Epidamnus, where they meet the real Menaechmus and the hilarity of mistaken identity ensues.

*The Brothers Menaechmus* starts with an argument between Menaechmus and his wife over what to have for dinner, which ends with Menaechmus going to see his mistress in a fit of anger. In the man's world that is Republican Rome, it is his prerogative to have dinner when, where and how he likes it—regardless of what else is going on within the household. This—almost childish—fit of rage and his subsequent storming off seem to highlight the rigid patriarchal environment in which Plautus is writing. Emphasizing this outburst could be a way to point to how childish and ridiculous Menaechmus is acting in a way that a Roman audience would find hilarious. On the other hand, it could also be Plautus critiquing a pervasive double standard that existed in ancient Roman society. Women were expected to restrict their sexual activities to their husband, while men were not held to the same moral code. It is similar to the idea that “boys will be boys”, but women/girls need to be “better”. A lot of Roman literature, especially comedy, was used to either comment on or promote notions of popular morality.

This play is interesting because it is the only play, that I touch on, that has a prostitute in it, Erotium. Scholars view her inclusion as a way to provide contrast to Menaechmus's wife, Matriona. It is important to note that Matriona is not actually her name, but instead just means “his wife.” It is very significant that Menaechmus' wife never gets a proper name in the play, while his mistress does. Naming one and not the other could be Plautus' way of showing the audience that Menaechmus's mistress is more important than his wife, to both him and the storyline, or that Matriona's identity is so generic that she needs no individualization.

Matriona represents the mundane, everyday domestic life and Erotium represents a sort of rebellion or break from the everyday. Erotium is a beautiful, outgoing, unmarried

woman that has sex with men for money. She represents a complete departure from the domestic norms of Roman culture and as a result is both mysterious and eroticized in the eyes of Menaechmus. It is important to note that indulging in prostitutes is an acceptable norm in Roman culture for men, so it is not as though Menaechmus is doing something completely countercultural. However, the contrast between Matrona and Erotium of also reveals something of Plautus' perspective on the roles different women play in society and how society treats and values them. For the most part, Erotium is described as a *mulier*, while Matrona is referred to as *uxor* (wife).

The first time *mulier* is mentioned in the play is when Messenio is talking to Sosicles and warning him about all the vices in Epidamnus. Messenio says: ... *tum meretrices mulieres nusquam perhibentur blandiores gentium* (The *meretrices mulieres* are regarded as the most coaxing in the nation. *Menaechmi*, 261). Here it is clear that *mulier* is meant to be taken with *meretrix*, together meaning 'female prostitute'. A few lines later Sosicles says:

*tu amator magnus mulierum es, Messenio...* (*Menaechmi*, 268)

You are a great lover of women, Messenio...

Sosicles is here clearly referencing Messenio's sexual prowess. They were talking about who should hold the money that they had brought with them, and Sosicles says that he is worried that if Messenio has it, he will presumably spend it at the brothel. Thus, we are clearly meant to take this *mulierum*, which isn't modifying a *meretrix*, as indicative of prostitutes in particular, given the context and previous usage. This is interesting because the next time *mulier* appears is about 100 lines later when Messenio and Sosicles are talking and Messenio says:

*Observato modo: nam istic meretricem credo habitere mulierum...* (*Menaechmi*, 335)

Just watch: I believe a prostitute lives there...

Like before, it is clear that there is an association between *meretrix* and *mulier* which indicates that a *meretrix* and *mulier* are in some way connected in meaning, be it implicitly or explicitly.

*Mulier* is used again when Erotium first mistakes Sosicles for Menaechmus.

Throughout their conversation, Sosicles refers to her as either 'mad' or 'drunk' to think that they have ever met before. Messenio says:

*Nam ita sunt hic meretrices: omnes elecebrae argentariae. Sed sine me dum hanc compellare. Heus mulier, tibi dico. (Menaechmi, 377-378)*

Yes, the prostitutes here are like this: they are all magnets to silver. But let me address her. Hey women, I am speaking to you.

Sosicles addresses Erotium directly as a *mulier*. This, paired with the fact that he was just accusing her of being 'drunk' or 'mad', is worth noting because it reinforces Sosicles' characterization of Erotium as neither a 'good' nor a virtuous woman. Because of this characterization, Plautus actively chose to use *mulier* instead of *femina*. Throughout this scene, Sosicles keeps calling her a *mulier non sana*-- an insane woman (prostitute)/ a woman not in her right mind, which further reinforces the negative association, and calls to mind the similar pairing of madness and *mulier* in *Amyphitryo*.

In Act Five, when Sosicles and Matrona are fighting, Sosicles uses *mulier* several times. This scene comes right after Menaechmus steals one of Matrona's dresses to give to Erotium as a gift. Matrona finds out and gets angry. Here Matrona sees Sosicles carrying the dress and assumes he is Menaechmus. Matrona then walks over and starts to yell at Sosicles. Immediately, Sosicles refers to her as a *mulier*. She approaches him and says:

*Adibo atque hominem accipiam quibus dictis meret. Non te pudet prodire in conspectum meum, flagitum hominis, cum istoc ornatu? (Menaechmi, 707-709).*

I will approach him [Sosicles] and welcome him with the words he merits. Aren't you ashamed to come under my gaze with that ornament, you disgrace of a man?

To which Sosicles replies:

*quid est? quae te res agitat, mulier? (Menaechmi, 709-710)*

What is it? What is troubling you, woman?

The use of *mulier* here, once again, seems to show the contempt that Sosicles has for Matrona, a contempt which could also be extended to women in general. Additionally, Plautus wants to reinforce that the characters in the play all think that she is crazy, however the audience knows that she is not. This contrasts with the fact that she does not look crazy to others at this moment, instead it seems to just be a regular woman yelling at the person that she thinks stole her dress. By pairing the immoral behavior that is implied by *mulier* with an unsound mental state, Plautus is trying to connect the two. This could either be because he wants to make the point that only mentally unsound women are *mulieres* or that being a *mulier* makes one mentally unsound. Either of these associations shows the negative implications that *mulier* so obviously carries.

A few lines later Sosicles compares her to the famous Hecuba, wife of Priam of Troy.

*Non tu scis, mulier, hecubam quapropeter canem Graii esse praedicabant?  
(Menaechmi, 713-715)*

Don't you know, woman, why the Greeks said that Hecuba was a bitch?

He goes on to say:

*Quia idem faciebat Hecuba quod tu nunc facis: omnia mala ingerebat quemquem aspexerat. Itaque adeo iure coepta appellari est Canes. (Menaechmi, 717-719)*

Because Hecuba was doing the same thing that you are doing now: she heaped all sorts of insults on anyone she saw. For that reason, she rightly came to be called the bitch.

This sentence further reinforces the connection between *mulier* and the idea of the crazy, mean, or mentally unstable woman. However, it does not seem that mental instability is the only connotation here. The comparison to “the bitch” seems to indicate a woman whose behavior is reprehensible or below what one would expect of a respectable *uxor* or *femina*.

In *Amphitryon* and *Menaechmi*, Plautus seems to use *mulier* as a way to describe the women in the play acting outside acceptable standards of behavior, or he describes them when they are getting fooled. The places where *mulier* is used in *Amphitryon* is when Mercury comments on how Jupiter is going to get away with pretending to be Amphitryon, and laughs with the audience about it. The second place is when Amphitryon accuses his wife of being mentally unsound. In *Menaechmi* it appears when one of the brothers is talking to or about Erotium, Menaechmus’ mistress, or when his wife is acting crazy. Although there does not seem to be conclusive evidence to say that it must necessarily denote a “whore” or an “impure woman,” it is clear based on context that it is not a positive term.

## **Conclusion**

The language that authors use to describe characters gives the audience and the reader a general idea about how they are to perceive said characters. A modern author sends important signals to readers when they apply such terms as, 'lady,' 'whore,' or 'chick' to a given character. This is certainly true of *femina*, *puella* and as I have shown, *mulier*. Sallust and Plautus consistently play on the colloquial meaning to imply that the characters described as such have some kind of negative morals and, in some cases, are sexually promiscuous.

Sallust uses *mulier* to describe women who could not possibly be *feminae*, or who, because of their station, should be *feminae*, but whose behavior invalidates such a positive term. This usage applies to the women he names, like Sempronia and Aurelia Orestilla, but also to the unnamed female followers of Cataline, and at one point more generally to the women of Rome. And even in the *BJ*, which barely mentions women at all, Sallust describes them as *mulieres* instead of *feminae*. He uses these terms as a way to implicitly compare his traditional idea of a 'good woman' with the 'reality' of women in Rome as a way to comment on the decline of the Republic.

Plautus uses *mulier* more directly as a way to describe prostitutes, like Erotium in the *Menaechmi*. He also uses it to show a woman who, in his opinion, is acting 'crazy'. This is clear in both the *Amphitryo* and the *Menaechmi*. To prove this point, he connects the ideal of sexual promiscuity with mental unsoundness. This combination renders a woman's behavior problematic, thus preventing her from being traditionally 'good'. Like Sallust, his word choice is meant to communicate underlying meaning to the audience about the

characters in which he describes. He aims to stress that these women are not 'good,' via the link between mental instability and the colloquial use of *mulier*.

Though this study is by no means exhaustive, it does help us understand how simple terms that reflect sex and gender can be used to imply far more. Further studies into similar applications of other basic terms for such ideas as "male" or "Roman" may yield similar results. Examining the application of terminology in the literature of different time periods will allow us to deepen our understanding of the way authors used colloquial language to communicate underlying meaning to their audience.



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