Interpretatio Foedior Potior: Lucilius 543 Marx

One of the longer and grosser hexameter passages in Lucilius is this from Book XVII, lines 540-46 in Marx's numeration:[1]

> num censes calliplocamon callisphyron ullam
> non licitum esse uterum atque etiam inguina tangere mammis,
> conpernem aut varam fuisse Amphitryonis acoetin
> Alcmenam, atque alias, Helenam ipsam denique – nolo
> dicere: tute vide atque disyllabon elige quodvis –
> κούρην eupatereiam aliquam rem insignem habuisse,
> verrucam naevum punctum dentem eminulum unum?

There is more than one textual question in this interesting fragment. For instance, we may well wonder why Lucilius would use Greek endings for *calliplocamon* and *callisphyron* in the first line, Latin for *eupatereiam* in the sixth: however, any attempt to standardize them either way would be difficult, since the latter two are guaranteed by the meter.

However, I am concerned here with a semi-textual question.[2] If Lucilius is thinking of some particular word to fill the gap left by his aposiopesis in the fourth line, what word is it? The interruption is exactly two syllables plus a line, which implies that the missing word should fit in the same slot as *nolo*. Either a disyllable or a trisillable in synaloephe with *denique* would scan, but Lucilius specifies the former (*disyllabon elige quodvis*). The word must be spondaic or trochaic, and begin with one or more consonants, enough to avoid synaloephe but not enough to 'make position' and lengthen the third syllable in *denique*. It must of course be a feminine adjective. Should the word be accusative to fit the grammar? Presumably. Should it be plural to fit with 'others, even Helen', or singular, modifying only *Helenam*? Editors who offer an opinion (not all do) prefer the singular, though I am unable to make up my mind. There is a near-unanimity on the kind of supplement required. Warmington: "such as *moecham*." Marx: "uersum disyllabo apte expleat aliquis si 'moecham' vel 'scortum' addat." Krenkel: "Als

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[1] Editors agree in assigning the lines to Book XVII, but number them as fragment 1 (Dousa) or 2 (Charpin), or lines 469-75 (Lachmann), 1-7 (Mueller), 540-46 (Marx), 570-76 (Terzaghi), 567-73 (Warmington), 541-47 (Krenkel), 537-43 (Christes). Not having any strong opinion about the other textual problems, I reproduce Krenkel's text, omitting the angle brackets and metrical ictus-marks and the apparatus, since the variants do not affect my point.

zweisilbiges Wort kann *moecha*, *scortum* o. ä. ergänzt werden." (I don't know why he leaves them in the nominative.) Charpin: "un disyllabe tel que *moecham* ou *scortum*".

Whether singular or plural, neither *moecham* nor *scortum* will do. The defects before the break-off are (a) major, and (b) invisible when a women is dressed like (or rather as) a Roman *matrona* of the period, situated between her beautiful braids and beautiful ankes, both mentioned in the first line.[3] The defects named after the break-off, in the last line, are visible, but trivial. Both classes of defect are neither spiritual nor behavioral, but purely physical, and incurable in the days before cosmetic surgery and dentistry. That rules out *moecham* and *scortum*, which refer to behavioral and moral, not physical, defects.[4]

Certainty is impossible, and Lucilius may not have had a particular word in mind, but a stroll through the sleazier neighborhoods of Latin literature – Catullus, the three canonical post-Lucilian satirists (very much including Horace's *Epodes* as well as his *Satires*), Martial, and the *Priapea* – raises some possibilities. Here's one that would make an appropriate third for a *tricolon crescens* of severe hidden physical defects: *laxas*.[5] Martial 11.21 is the *locus classicus* for this particular condition, *Priapea* 18 another example. I suspect there are more, but it's not the pleasantest thing to research.

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[2] Only semi-textual because the word is not to be printed in the text, only heard behind it, as there *in posse*.

[3] In this context, *vide* in the fifth line is surely a metaphorical not-very-visual 'see if'.

[4] Also *cunnum* (if anyone is thinking of adducing Horace's second and third Satires), which is not a defect but an offensive name for an unexceptionable and even admirable organ.

[5] Or, of course, singular *laxam*: restricting the adjective to the notoriously *plurivira* Helen of Troy might be a plus.