Plautus *Mostellaria* 213: Another *anus ebría*?

Illa hanc corrumpit mulierem malesuada †vitilena†.

For centuries scholars have been wrestling intensely with the text and sense of this enigmatic line, most recently Friedrich (1965), Nosarti (1995), and Rosivach (1998).\(^1\) Innumerable conjectures have been proposed. None, however, has managed to win universal acceptance. Nowadays, most editors simply mark *vitilena* as irremediably corrupt.\(^2\) The search for a suitable emendation has been all but abandoned. In this note, I would like to suggest that this was done prematurely.

The verse in question is part of the well-known scene in which the beautiful *betaera* Philematium is modeling different dresses on stage. Her lover, young Philolaches, secretly overhears Philematium’s conversation with her cynical old maid, Scapha. Scapha warns her mistress that she should not devote herself solely to Philolaches because he will eventually leave her just as Scapha herself was once abandoned by her lover. Our verse belongs to a series of increasingly angry asides in which Philolaches comments on Scapha’s advice.

The transmitted text poses two problems. Most importantly, *vitilēnā* is unmetrical and thus clearly corrupt. In order to fit into the cadence of the iambic septenarius, the first *i* would have to be long. Yet *vitilena* is plainly a compound of *vitium + lena*, and all vowels in *vitium* are short by nature. Previous attempts to save the transmitted text by scanning *malesuada* as a five-syllabic word,\(^3\) without the usual synizesis in *-ua-*, have all overlooked the fact that Plautus regularly observes synizesis in *suadeo, suavis* and their compounds.\(^4\)

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1) See Nosarti 1995 for a convenient discussion of much of the older literature.
2) Cf. the editions of Leo (1896), Schoell & Goetz (1896), Lindsay (1905), Ernout (1961), Augello (1968), Collart (1970), Moreschini (1970), and Bettini (1991) *ad loc*. More recently, *vitilena* has been printed without cruces only in Terzaghi 1929, 47, Merrill 1972, 78, and Paratore 1976, 400. Paratore, however, separates *vīti lena*, and Merrill’s appendix, while refraining from using the word “corrupt”, at least calls *vitilena* an “uncertain” reading (1972, 116).
3) Cf. Bothe 1821, 75; Terzaghi 1929, 47.
4) Cf. Questa 1967, 79 n. 1; *id.* 2007, 173-4. In addition, Nosarti (1995, 35 n. 2) points out, quite correctly, that reading *malesuada vitilena* creates a split resolution in the sixth foot, *-ădă ui-*, a violation of Ritschl’s Law.
Another consideration that has moved editors since Leo to obelize *vitilena* is that there is no parallel for this compound in all of Latin literature.\(^5\) Even the collocation *viti(i) lena* is completely unparalleled. Terzaghi (1929, 47) quoted a few ancient glossary entries as parallels, but they, in fact, all use the genitive plural *vitiorum* instead of the more awkward genitive singular: *lena vitiorum: seductrix* (‘procuress of vices: seductress’, cf. CGE IV 254.21; 533.25; V 505.55 Goetz).

Nevertheless, earlier attempts to heal the corruption often stuck very closely to the transmitted text. Most simply added a syllable to fix the metrical problem. In his earliest edition of Plautus, for example, Bothe proposed *malesuada <nunc>* *vitilena* (1810, 446); later, he apparently suggested to add *mi* instead.\(^6\) Even less invasive are Lambinus’ *viti<ī> lena* (1576)\(^7\) and now Nosarti’s *viti<um>* *lena*. In Plautus, however, the genitive singular of nouns in *-ius* or *-ium* always ends in *-i*.\(^8\) and Nosarti’s suggestion would restore an archaic but relatively rare genitive plural form (1995, 35). Among the somewhat bolder interventions that could be mentioned are Ritschl’s *malesuada invitam lena* (1851, 29), which produces a rather convoluted word order, Brix’s *malesuada vetula lena* (1854, 18), and Sigismund’s *malesuada nibili lena* (1894, 85).\(^9\)

Not surprisingly, other scholars have objected to most of these proposals because Scapha is not really a professional procuress (*lena*) but Philematium’s old maid and confidante.\(^10\) Even in the frequently quoted line 270, Philolaches does not actually call Scapha a *lena*; he only compares her intelligence with that of a procuress: *non videor vidisse lenam callidiorum ullam alteram* (‘I don’t think I’ve ever seen any procuress more cunning’). For that reason, Rosivach (1998, 150 n. 15) has recently revived an old suggestion from Sonnenschein (1907, 151), *malesuada uti<que> lena*, which was inspired by the readings of two manuscripts, *utilena* (C) and *utilena* (D).\(^3\) The only problem is that *utique* (‘whatever the case; for certain; at least’) does not mean the same as *uti* (‘like’), and if we have to understand *utique* as ‘and like’, the syntax becomes strange. It would be preferable to change the

\(^5\) Accordingly, Lindner’s recent work on Latin compounds lists *vitilena* only under the entry “Unsichere Belege/Konjekturen” (2002, 247).

\(^6\) Quoted in Ritschl’s apparatus (1851, 29).

\(^7\) Cf. also Camerarius’ *vicii lena* (1552), both quoted, e.g., by Nosarti (1995, 30 n. 1), and the compound form conjectured by Fay (1897, 177), *viti<is>* *lena*.

\(^8\) I owe this observation to Mnemosyne’s anonymous referee.

\(^9\) Even bolder and even less convincing are *hapax legomena* such as *vitilenulla* (Ritschl & Schoell 1893, 23), *malesuadelā vii* *lena* (Fay 1903, 266), and *vitilagoena* (‘wine bottle’) (Schuster & Schupp 1934, 52).

\(^10\) Sonnenschein (1907, 151) misrepresents her as a servant in Philolaches’ house; better Rosivach (1998, 150).