CENTONES: Recycled Art or the Embodiment of Absolute Intertextuality?

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One of the most controversial literary forms within the corpus of the extant late ancient poetry is doubtlessly the intriguing cento, the underlying poetics of which, as will be sufficiently corroborated, almost necessarily elicits ambivalent critical stances. The denomination of the poetic compositions in question is, unsurprisingly enough, of Greek origin; even though there is not a perfect one-to-one semantic correspondence between the Greek term κέντρων\(^1\) and the Latin word cento, the basic original meaning common to both these expressions denotes «eine aus Resten gebrauchten Stoffes zusammengenähte Decke».\(^2\) As figurative titles, the discussed terms later came to refer to patchwork poems fashioned out of separate lines or half-lines appropriated more or less verbatim from the great bards of the past, in the context of antiquity, typically, though not exclusively, from Homer and Virgil, and stitched together into various stories quite different from those related in the canonical model texts.\(^2\)

Thus, the discussed type of poetry is completely derivative as far as the syntagmata employed are concerned\(^4\) and at the same time highly original in terms of its formal conception and the very content of the individual cento pieces; in a sense, the uniqueness of the cento consists in its absolute derivativeness.\(^5\) As a matter of fact, it is exactly this contradiction or, to adopt poststructuralist terminology, this Derridean paradox\(^6\) perceptible in the formal conception of the hotchpotch poems that appears to have been a thorn in the flesh of several ancient, as well as modern scholars and literary critics, who essentially considered the cento as mere childish play and condemned such verse as a serious devaluation, or at least as an improper use, of the inviolable masterworks.\(^7\) Before I embark on a thorough analysis of the cento poems and clarify my stance in the heated debate over the literary legitimacy of the cento form, a concise historical overview of the discussed type of poetry, demonstrating that obviously not all men of letters were equally prejudiced against the non-classical practice of centonizing the classics, shall be provided.

Conceptually speaking, the cento technique seems to be closely linked to the orality of early ancient Greek society; the roots of cento composition can be detected in the tradition of the Homeric rhapsodes.\(^8\) These professional reciters first committed the vast stock of epic material ascribed to Homer to memory and then refashioned it in each and every performance in a way similar to the centonists’ treatment of their source texts. The fully-fledged Greek cento compositions are, however, of much later origin. The cento was a familiar and relatively popular literary form in the Hellenistic period, the subsequent Roman period, and the era of the Byzantine Empire. Anyway, there are actually not many representative and substantial examples that survived those days.\(^9\) The extant Homeric centos comprise three short mythological poems included in the Byzantine collection titled Anthologia Palatina,\(^10\) a ten-line cento quoted by the second-century bishop of Lyons Irenaeus in his work Adversus Haereses,\(^11\) a six-line cento in the scholia to Dionysius Thrax, and a seven-line graffiti inscribed on the statue of Memnon in Egypt.\(^12\) On the whole, the only extensive Homeric centos we have originated in Byzantine Greece and elaborate on biblical themes. The Homeric adaptation at issue is the Christian cento by the fourth-century bishop Patricius, which was later significantly expanded by the empress Eudocia, wife of Theodosius II.\(^13\)

The Virgilian patchwork poems were, similarly to the Homeric ones, flourishing particularly in late antiquity.\(^14\) All of the sixteen extant Latin centos were composed sometime between the second and sixth century AD; the rough terminal dates proposed by Scott McGill are years 200 and 534.\(^15\) On the basis of the themes handled, we can distinguish poems on mythological and secular subjects,\(^16\) and the Christian variety.\(^17\) The former group comprises the anonymous Narcissus, Hippodamia,\(^18\) Hercules et Antaeus, Progne et Philomela, Europa, Alecsta, and the Judicium Paridis, traditionally attributed to Mavortius,\(^19\) conserved in 527 AD; all the listed centos relate quite well-known mythological stories. The remaining non-Christian centos are Hosidius Geta’s\(^20\) tragedy Medea\(^21\) and two epithalamia: the Epithalamium Friderici\(^22\) by the sixth-century epigrammatist Luxuriosus\(^23\) and Ausonius’ Cento Nuptialis.\(^24\) Last but not least, the pagan cento collection also includes the anonymous pieces De Panificio and De Alea,\(^25\) both of which depict rather trivial matters, namely the baking of bread and maybe a game of dice.\(^26\) The Latin Christian cento poetry contains
The anonymous *De Verbi Incarnatone*, the *De Ecclesia*, whose probable author is the above-mentioned Mavorius, the *Versus ad Gratiam Domini*, a work attributed to someone named Pomponius and composed perhaps in the fifth century, and the famous *Cento Probac* by the fourth-century poetess Proba.

For the sake of complexity of the above-provided account, it should be remarked that there also existed non-Homeric and non-Virgilian *centos* fabricated, for example, from the verses of Hesiod or Ovid, as well as works that Giovanni Salnitro terms pseudo-*centos* such as the comic epic *Batrachomyomachia* or Reponsianus's *De Concubitu Martis et Venere*. Finally, we should observe that the *cento* form did not die out at the end of classical antiquity; rather, this poetic oddity remained popular in medieval as well as Renaissance literature and continues to be cultivated in modern times, too.

As becomes evident from the preceding survey, the production of Greek, as well as Latin *cento* poetry is characteristic of the later stages of the respective literary traditions. This close parallelism is admittedly not fortuitous. Generally speaking, late ancient authors' literary preoccupations are marked by significant formalism. Without much exaggeration, we can speak about the cult of form adhered to at the expense of content and actually lying at the very root of the *cento* technique. The centonists were above all experimenters in poetic form. They expressed themselves in Virgil's language, which obviously imposed serious limitations on the literary quality of their works and occasionally resulted in their vagueness and obscurity. The most glaring example in this respect is the *De Alece*; in this case, not even the very subject matter of the *cento* can be determined beyond doubt because of the poem's inaccurate and metaphorical wording. Whether the piece really portrays dicing, as its title suggests, and likens it to a combat between armed forces or whether it rather describes a kind of athletic — presumably gladiatorial — competition held in an amphitheatre simply remains unclear.

Nonetheless, as I have already suggested, the *cento* poetry was perfectly in line with the spirit of the age and contemporary authors' predilections for various 'original' and formally elaborate adaptations of the canonical texts. In fact, the late ancient notion of originality markedly differed from, for instance, the Romantic concept of the creative spirit or the modern understanding of the author's genius. The patchwork texts should simply be viewed in connection with the ancient tradition of the *imitatio vatum*. The centonists undoubtedly embraced this concept *satis superque*.

In the ensuing examination of the modes of production of the *cento* verse, the focus will be predominantly on the Latin *centos* and specifically on the non-Christian conversions of the Virgilian material, which, while being formally, and thus generically, the same as the Christian *centos*, are still substantially different from them, especially in terms of purport and mood. The formal design of both the above-mentioned *cento* types exhibits equal playfulness. Nevertheless, whereas the authors of the pagan *centos* handle rather trivial themes and their creations are typically of humorous and frolic nature, the Christian patchwork pieces are meant to be serious poetic endeavours exalted in both tone and thought. The stark contrast between, on the one hand, Ausonius's and Luxorius's employment of Virgil's language as an effective means of divulging the secrets of the wedding night, or the practically parodical accommodations of the bard's dignified epic to very down-to-earth topics such as breadmaking and dicing, and on the other hand, Proba's programmatic declaration that she »will say that Vergil sang the holy gifts of Christ« is all too evident. In point of fact, the pagan *centos*, whose rather frivolous topics are perfectly consistent with their frolicsome mechanics of composition, appear to be more consonant with the ancient understanding of the role and purpose of the patchwork texts than the Christian *cento* interpretations of Virgil actually are.

The most comprehensive ancient source of information on the *cento* poetics is indisputably a unique prose prefatory letter to the *Cento Nuptialis*, which Ausonius addressed to his friend, the rhetor Axius Paulus. In this epistle, the fourth-century poet, rhetorician, and, in a sense, literary theorist exposes the principles and specifies the rules of *cento* composition. The basic inherent quality of the *centos* that Ausonius repeatedly points out is the playful and ludicrous nature of these poetic enterprises, which he considers as trifling rather than serious works. At the very beginning of the proem, Ausonius designates his poem as *frivolum et nullius pretii opusculum* (CN, pref. 1). The poet then briefly comments on the origin of the term *cento*, using the verb *ludere*: *centonem vocant qui primi hac*


conciminatione luserant (3). The next sentence, in which Ausonius describes the process of composing his own cento and envisages what the reader’s reaction to this minor poem may be like, reads as follows: solae memoriae negotium sparsa colligere et integrare lacerata, quod ridere magis quam laudare possis (4f). Further, we should note the use of the noun ludus in lines 11 and 43, the employment of the deverbalative noun ridenda in line 20, the adjective iocularis in line 7 and ludicus in line 21, the nominal use of the latter adjective in line 32, and, last but not least, the adjective ridiculus in line 42 of Ausonius’ preface. All of the above-listed expressions refer more or less directly to Ausonius’ cento opusculum or the cento in general.

On the basis of the above-presented textual evidence, we can draw the conclusion that Ausonius’ opinion on the cento was a bit deprecative. Even though this is most probably to a large extent a matter of the authorial pose of modesty quite common in the prefaces to ancient works and conventionally adopted to appeal to readers’ benevolence,50 the debated attitude of Ausonius is not thoroughly insignificant. The poet makes it clear that he cherishes no aspirations to compete with serious poetic works; he acknowledges that the cento is a kind of literary play or memory exercise,51 and as such should be classed among the minor, light forms of poetry.

Another distinguishing quality of the cento that Ausonius notices is its derivative and piecemeal essence, which, however, at least in his opinion, should constitute no insuperable obstacle to the unity and coherence of the patchwork pieces. The poet claims that his cento, and therefore every work written in the cento form, is or should be de inconexis continuum, de diversis unum, de seriis ludicrum, de alieno nostrum (CN, praef. 20f.). The same motif reappears later in the epistle where Ausonius characterizes the structure of the patchwork poem in the following way: variis de locis sensibusque diversis quaedam carminis structura solidatur (2f.).52 The poet consequently takes this explanation as a starting point for his description of the verse schemes and metrical rules recommended for the cento.53 The wholeness vs. the patchiness of the cento pieces is again discussed in the concluding part of Ausonius’ epistle. After a lengthy figurative passage in which the author befittingly compares the patchwork technique to the ancient Greek jigsaw-puzzle-like game called oρoτά-χιον,54 he returns to the cento proper and presents the final set of rules under which the piecemeal poems should operate:

hoc ergo centonis opusculum ut ille ludus tractatur, pari modo sensus diversi ut congruant, adoptiva quaee sunt ut cognata videantur, aliena ne interlucent, arcessita ne vim redarguant, densa ne supra modum protuberent, hiulca ne pateant. (43-46)55

The emphasis here is again on the neat coalescence of the individual Virgilian verse units, the linkage of which should become virtually invisible so that the piece could give the impression of an organic whole, which conveys a distinct meaning.

Lastly, we should note that the tone which Ausonius adopts in the debated preface is not only instructive and ostensibly disparaging, as demonstrated above, but also apparently apologetic. At one point he claims that he regrets having profaned the dignity of Virgil’s poetry: piget equidem Vergiliani carminis dignitatem tam ioculari dehonestasse materia (CN, praef. 7f.). This subject then recurs in the parechasis included in the Cento Nuptialis56 (cetera quoque cubiculi et lectuli operta prodentur, ab eodem autore collecta, ut bis erubescamus qui et Vergilium faciamus impudentem) [CN, parech. 4-6] and it is further discussed in the epistolary epilogue of the cento57 where it becomes evident, however, that the author is certainly not serious about his feelings of remorse towards Virgil and his works. On the contrary, Ausonius asks his friend to defend him against those of his potential readers who would judge his morality from the character of his poem (sed cum legeris, adesto mihi adversum eos, qui, ut Juvenalis ait, Curios simulant et Bacchanalia vivunt!, ne fortasse mores meos spectent de carmine [CN, epilog. 1-3]) and emphasizes that the obscurity of a work of literature gives absolutely no indication of the low morals of its author: lasciva est nobis pagina, vita proba!, ut Martialis dicit (3). Moreover, Ausonius even suggests that the indecency of his verse stems actually from Virgil (et si quid in nostro ioco alliquorum hominum severitas vestita condemnat, de Vergilio arcessitum sciat [17f.]), which means that he himself is beyond reproach. The poet essentially intimates that even the writings of such a reputable author as Virgil are not devoid of possible ambiguities and hidden obsce-
nineties, which ancient grammarians termed cacemphata.\textsuperscript{58} In effect, the somewhat elusive quality of Virgil’s language is perhaps one of the reasons why his works were so frequently reused and \textit{abused} in antiquity.\textsuperscript{59}

After the examination of the most important concepts of the \textit{cento} technique as they were programmatically formulated by one of its practitioners, it is essential to emphasize that the above-discussed intrinsic characteristics of the patchwork pieces, namely their derivativeness and their playful nature, were exactly what their critics could not bear. The Christian apologist of the second-century AD Tertullian in his work \textit{De Praescriptione Haereticorum,} for example, remarks upon the defamiliarizing methods of \textit{cento} composition, which he disdains on account of its very — in his view, practically heretical — essence.\textsuperscript{60} Further, two centuries later, Jerome, another Christian apologist, in one of his letters despises the piecemeal texts for similar reasons.\textsuperscript{61} It is evident that these two opinions on the \textit{cento} poetic arts were necessarily theologically biased.\textsuperscript{62} Nevertheless, we can adduce a more recent example of a surprisingly severe \textit{cento} criticism voiced from a purely literary theoretical perspective; D.R. Shackleton Bailey, the author of the 1982 edition of the \textit{Anthologia Latina,} rejected the ancient Virgilian \textit{centos} as literary eccentricities, and even refused to include any of the twelve patchwork texts contained in Alexander Riese’s edition of the same anthology in his own volume.\textsuperscript{63} To be sure, recent verdicts on the \textit{cento} are typically much more lenient.

Having clarified in what ways the basic underlying principles of the \textit{cento} poetic arts represent its most controversial aspects, let us focus on what the intricate \textit{cento} form entails for its general readership. Essentially, in order to penetrate all the significance inherent in the \textit{centos}, readers have to be continually aware of the semantic duality of these texts, which are made up of independent Homeric or Virgilian phrases uprooted from their original contexts and transposed to new and different ones.\textsuperscript{64} This defamiliarizing technique\textsuperscript{65} applied to the authoritative classics poses a big challenge for the recipients of the \textit{cento} poetry, who have to pay close attention to the greater or lesser changes in the denotations of the individual formulations appropriated from the canonical writers. In reading a patchwork text, one is simply supposed to negotiate its meaning with constant reference to the source material. The readers of the Latin \textit{centos} are therefore expected to approach these \textit{verse jigsaw puzzles} with profound knowledge of Virgil’s poetry; otherwise, they cannot relish the unique interplay of meanings, which contributes to the richness and complexity of the narratives told.

A case in point is the \textit{cento} tragedy Medea by Hosidius Geta; the author’s selection of particular lines from Aeneid 4 invites us to draw parallels and to recognize differences between the fortunes of the Colchian princess Medea and the destiny of her typological forerunner, the Carthaginian queen Dido. Moreover, as Scott McGill convincingly suggests, Geta’s adaptation of Virgil also echoes both Seneca’s tragedy \textit{Medea} and the lost play \textit{Medea} by Ovid.\textsuperscript{66} Such involved interplay of allusions is really supreme and ensures that Geta’s \textit{cento} makes both extremely demanding and unexpectedly rewarding reading. To sum up, thoughtful reading of such a \textit{cento} text requires the reader to recognize the means of its production as well as to actively participate in the centonists’ skilful play with language. Seen through the lens of modern reception theories, the reader reproduces and completes each particular \textit{cento} through interpretation and concretization.\textsuperscript{67}

From what has been observed on the mechanics of \textit{cento} composition and the readers’ reception of the patchwork poems, we can conclude that the semiotics of these literary works, as well as their semantics is determined by the allusiveness of their phrasing and the patchwork texts’ interactions with the base text, which is what eventually yields meaning.\textsuperscript{68} Viewed from the perspective of poststructuralist literary criticism, the \textit{cento} is therefore certainly one of the most blatantly and most pervasively intertextual modes of writing. The term \textit{intertextuality} was coined by Julia Kristeva in the late 1960’s and it generally refers to the complex interrelationships between literary texts that are essential for the recognition and interpretation of their signification.\textsuperscript{69} We have to acknowledge that the ancient \textit{centos} exemplify this underlying principle of all literature in general to the greatest degree possible.\textsuperscript{70}

In conclusion, I would like to consider the implications of the centonists’ work with language material as such. In adopting the exact verses of the bard of the past and rearranging them so that they convey new and distinct meanings,\textsuperscript{71} the authors of the patchwork poems take advantage of the arbitrariness of language, or rather a distinct literary metalanguage,
the significance of which is always dependent upon the surrounding context.\textsuperscript{72} In view of this fact, the \textit{cento}, whose effect on the readers very much depends on their interpretive skills, can be understood as a sort of verse comment on the communicative function of language. Contextual factors that play a key role in the formal conception of the \textit{cento} basically operate as the Saussurean differential elements constitutive of all discourse in general.\textsuperscript{73} In brief, what Ferdinand de Saussure and other structuralist linguists discerned as the very nature of language the ancient centonists enthusiastically exploited much earlier.

Taking all this into account, I believe that the \textit{cento}, rather than being an eccentric curiosity devoid of all literary value, is primarily a kind of intricate and actually perfectly legitimate play with language, which reflects its principles of operation.\textsuperscript{74} Being in fact the embodiment of absolute intertextuality, the patchwork poems implicitly question every notion of literary originality because they emphasize the interdependence of individual texts representing different literary metalanguages. The \textit{cento} is therefore ›recycled‹ art only in a more conspicuous way than the rest of literature inevitably is; this, however, does not mean that a work of literature can actually never be original and inventive. In fact, as an example of intertextuality \textit{par excellence}, the patchwork poetry is, at least conceptually, a highly innovative literary form.

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\textsuperscript{28} On Pomponius’s authorship and the dating of the \textit{cento}, cf., e.g., Salanitro 1997, p. 235ff.


\textsuperscript{33} Essentially, \textit{cento} poems, as Wilken 1967, p. 28, remarks, »could be composed out of any well known author such as Homer, Hesiod, Virgil, or Ovid. Clark/Iatch 1981a, p. 37, note 9, mention a Greek \textit{cento} composition on the passion of Christ consisting of lines adopted from the plays of Euripides and ascribed to Gregory of Nazianzus; Verweyen/Ritting 1991, p. 168, refer to Lucian’s \textit{cento} nuptial ode composed out of the verses of Pindar, Hesiod, and..."

For a general account of the non-Homeric and the non-Virgilian centos, cf. Salanitro 1981, p. 151. McGill 2005, p. 23, however, points out that the cento cannot be seen as an instance of the regular imitatio cum variante because its intertextual relationship to the model text is unprecedented; on Virgil as a source for imitative and emulative literary works, cf. ibid., p. xxviii.


41 Ibid., pp. 193-216: Lamarcchia, e.g., sees a direct link between the technique of cento composition and what we may call scholastic classicism responsible for the mimetic character of ancient literature in general. The same point is mentioned by Salanitro 1981, p. 151. McGill 2005, p. 23, however, points out that the cento cannot be seen as an instance of the regular imitatio cum variante because its intertextual relationship to the model text is unprecedented; on Virgil as a source for imitative and emulative literary works, cf. ibid., p. xxviii.

42 On the distinctions between the licentious cento and the grave Christian type, cf. e.g., Pavlovskis 1989, p. 82f. On the essential differences between the Greek and the Latin Christian centos, cf. ibid., p. 72f.


44 On the perception of the De Panificiis and De Alsa as the only really parodic cento pieces, cf. McGill 2000, p. 53ff.


46 Henceforth abb. as CN, praef.


48 The ludic character of the cento is dealt with in detail esp. in ibid., p. 5ff. Lamarcchia 1958a, p. 214, even remarks that the cento can be seen as one of the more ingenious descriptions of the playful technopaegnion (cf. note 37 earlier).

49 All quotations of Ausonius’s text were taken from Green 1991.


51 The role of memory and ancient mnemonic techniques in composing patchwork poems is examined in ibid., p. 10f. On the scholastic memory exercises by ancient authors, cf. also Lamarcchia 1958a, p. 193.

52 In analysing these lines, McGill 2005, p. 19, focuses esp. on the figu- rative significance of the word struc- tura and remarks that centonists treat Virgil’s language as though it had a material presence.

53 Auson. CN, praef. 25-30; [...] in unum versum ut coeant aut caesi duo aut unus et unus sequi sequuntur centum. nam duos iunctam locare ineptum est et tres una serie mereae nugae, diffunduntur autem per caesuras omnes, quas recipit versus heroicus, con- venire ut possit aut penthemimeres cum relatio anaepaetica aut trochace cum posterio sequentes aut septem sequipes cum anaepaetico arthoecho aut */ post dactylum atque arthoecho di- quicquid restat hexametro, [...]. For this on a comm. of this set of metrical rules of cento composition and their application in the Medea of Hosidius Geta, cf. Lamarcchia 1958b, pp. 175-206.

54 Auson. CN, praef. 32-42; [...] simile ut dictas ludico, quod Graeci corrigi vocareo, ossecula ea sunt: ad summam quattuordecim figuram geometricam habent, sunt enim quasquaterviae vel inquatro exentia linea aut <eiusdem> frontis, vel <aequatione> vel aequalea, vel <recta> angulis vel oblongis: isoceles ipsi vel isoscele ipsi vel isoscelea vacant, orthogonia quoque et scalena, harum verticiarum variis coagentibus simulaturn species mille formatum: elephasus belus aut aper bestia, anser volans et mirmillo in amnis, subaedes venator et latrans canis, quin et tumus et canthus et alia aevismodi innumerablim figuram, quae alius alios scientes varietat, sed penthorum concinnato miraculam est, imperfectum iunctura ridiculum. The meaning of this rather extensive metaphorical passage is interpreted by McGill 2005, p. 81 and p. 204.

55 These lines are closely linked to the above-quoted figurative descrip- tion of the cento text as a structure. McGill notices that Ausonius again characterizes the cento «in structural terms» in this passage (ibid., p. 20). Cf. note 52.

56 Henceforth abb. as CN, parech.

57 Henceforth abb. as CN, epilog.


59 Pavlovskis 1989, p. 72, says that, in comparison with Homer, «Virgil is perfunctory and indirect, more mysterious and therefore more suitable for imitation.»


61 Hier. Epist. 53, 7: taceo de meis similibus, qui si forte ad spectaculas sanctas post saeculares litteras vere- rent et semen correpro cosae auro- populi mulierem, quippe diuere, hoc legem dei putant nec scire dignantur, quippe prophetae, quippe apostoli sen- rent, sed ad sensum suum incongrua aptant testimonia, quae grande sit et non utilissimum dicendi genus depraueat sententias et ad volunatem suam scripturam fue reprehendamus, quod non legimus homeroctenas et unguilorcentonas ac non sic eliam auro sic etiam maronein sine crime possimus dicere christianum, quod scripsit: iam redit et uergo, redline satirnia regnum, iam noua progenies caelo definitum alto, et patrem loquentem ad filium: nate, meae uires, mea magna potestate sa- lus, et post uetelia salutare in cruce: tali perturbat memoros fisus qui manebat, puerilia sunt haec et circula- torum homed simila, docere, quod igno- res, immo, et cum citharomaclo loquar, nec hoc quidem scire, quod nescias.
60 McGill 2005, p. vii, notes that both Tertullian’s and Jerome’s critical views on the cento, and Ausonius’s contemptuous attitude towards his own patchwork text merely reflect the particular interests of these figures.

61 Bailey 1982, p. iii: Ex camindus quae Alexander Riese in primo Anthologiae Latinae sue fasciculo A. C. 1894 curis secundis edidit paucis varis de causis praetempsis. [...] Cenones Vergiliani (Riese 7–18), appropria litterarum, neque ope critica multum indigent neque is sum qui vati reverendo denuo haec edendo centro meliam imponere sustineam.

62 Lamarcchia 1958a, p. 209, describes this feature of cento composition as semantic acrobatics. In her study of the semantic adaptations of Virgil’s lines in the cento tragedy by Hosiodus Geta, Lamarcchia 1958b, p. 161, underlines the fact that semantic changes form the very basis of the cento technique. Some of the most marked shifts in the meaning of the Virgilian verse units in the individual non-Christian centos are discussed in relevant chapters in McGill 2005.

63 Verweyen/Eitting 1991, p. 169, even use the expression »rivulous defamiliarization« in connection with the cento form; and Usher 1998, p. 121, describes the same aspect of the cento poetics with the Brechtian term Verfremdung.


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68 Essentially, allusive references to the Homeric or Virgilian works are omnipresent in every single cento by virtue of its secondary nature. Cf., e.g., McGill 2005, p. 23ff. On the cento in relation to the initiativeness and allusiveness of ancient poetry as such, cf. Lamarcchia 1958a, pp. 193-216. Cf. also Daube, David: The Influence of Interpretation on Writing. In: Cohen, David/Vimon, Dieter (Ed.): Collected Studies in Roman Law Vol. 2. Frankfurt/M: Klostermann, 1991, p. 1257, who does not mention allusion as the main driving force of the cento technique; instead, Daube says that “the cento originated in a mode of interpretation: anastrophe, interpretation by transposition”.


70 Gärtner/Riebermann 1997, p. 1061, observe that the cento »stellt einen Extremfall von Intertextualität dar. Cf. McGill 2005, p. 23, who says: »Cento intertextuality is also unique in how total it is [...] and how closely it is linked to a single source. No other literary form engages the work of a particular poet as openly, pervasively, and exclusively as the centos do.« The ways in which the cento can be seen as the embodiment of intertextuality are also discussed by Verweyen/Eitting 1991, pp. 165-178.

71 Usher 1998, p. 10ff., examines this feature of the cento poetics from the standpoint of modern linguistics and suggests that the relation between a patchwork poem and its source text can be seen as that of parole to langue, which is, in my view, an absolutely legitimate proposition.

72 In other words, as Pavlovskis 1989, p. 75, believes, «Inherent in any cento is a belief in the significance of language and the assumption that a meta-language can be built upon another metalanguage. The cento poetics therefore implicitly comments on the subservience and simultaneously the dominance of language versus meaning».


74 In short, I entirely agree with Pavlovskis 1989, p. 75, that in a sense language is what a cento is about.