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Theory and Practice in the Vergilian Cento*

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The history of Greek and Latin poetry is marked—some would say marred—by periods of bizarre experimentation with forms which show ingenuity of a mechanical sort but are, all in all, devoid of merit as *belles-lettres.* Into this category one would presumably put the cento. It had a long if not particularly honorable history,[1] and representatives appear in many unexpected corners of the classical field: Aristophanes, Lucian, Diogenes Laertius etc.[2]

Yet among the quirks of literary taste and oddities of accomplishment, the cento holds a special place. Other curiosities such as *versus rhopalici* are nothing more than games, and show more interest in numerology than in words or ideas. They manipulate the language by finding (or even, it may be, inventing) exotic words, simply to show that an idea can be expressed by a sequence of words with

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[1] Not, perhaps, as long as Crusius would claim (*RE* III. 2., cols. 1929-32): he would identify the Homeridae and the entire rhapsodic tradition as the first phase of the cento. But there is a fundamental difference between assembling consecutive verses of Homer to produce Homeric poetry, and combining non-consecutive pieces of Homeric verse to make an entirely new creation on the Christian Gospel (as was a not uncommon pursuit in the time of the Empress Eudocia: cf. Tzetz. *Chil.* X. 306).

[2] For a summary of our information on the ancient cento, see G. Salanitro, ed., *Osidio Geta: Medea* (Roma 1981), pp. 18-60; earlier and for some aspects more valuable is F. Ermini, *Il centone di Proba e la poesia centonaria latina* (Roma 1909), pp. 19-55.

arithmetically progressive numbers of syllables: never mind what the idea itself may be. Or again, a poet could aspire to a leipogrammatic summary of the *Odyssey*, or a *carmen figuratum*. These are mere juggler's tricks.

But the cento has two qualities which can raise it above its fellow literary freaks, although their effect is somewhat diminished in unskilled hands. First, it is composed entirely of verses and phrases already penned by a great poet—most frequently Homer or Vergil, although other poets were used for quarrying as well.[3] This has a general effect of felicitous expression at least at the level of the phrase or the individual line: it is as if the centonist were speaking a language whose unit of vocabulary is not the word but the well-turned phrase. Of course even with this initial advantage, a composer of little talent can contrive effects and commit errors to set our teeth on edge. But because of the underlying quality of the component expressions, we are less constantly stunned by the inherent freakishness of the enterprise itself than is the case with such visual games as a poem in the shape of a bird, or an acrostic for which the eye must follow the first, twentieth and final letters of the lines vertically as well as reading the lines themselves—usually distorted to the limits of the language to achieve this crossword effect.

The second saving grace, rather less reliably present than felicitous expression but certainly more common than in other *jeux de technique*, is that the cento was often used for significant subjects. There was of course a tradition, inconsistently followed, of parodic treatment in the centos, both in the early stages (e.g. the *Batrachomyomachia*, assuming it belongs in this category) and in the later (e.g. *De alea*[4] or Ausonius' *Cento nuptialis*[5]). But parody was certainly not the purpose behind the Christian centos, most notably Proba's *Cento Vergilianus de laudibus Christi*,[6] or indeed behind Hosidius Geta's *Medea*. These poems show both a seriousness and an ambition which set them far from any tradition of *nugae* and parody. The loftiness of the model

[3] The use of other poets is largely the phenomenon of a later era, up to and especially in the Renaissance: see the very full, if not very scholarly, work of O. Delepierre, *Tableau de la littérature du centon*, 2 vols. (London 1874-75).

[4] *Anth. Lat.* ed. A. Riese—F. Buecheler (Leipzig 1894), I. 1, pp. 34-38.

[5] Ausonius XIX: *Cento nuptialis*. Most recent text in S. Prete, *D. Magni Ausonii opuscula* (Leipzig 1978), pp. 159-69.

[6] Cf. Ermini (above, n.2); C. Schenkl, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* XVI (*Poetae christiani minores;* Vienna 1888), pp. 568-609; and now see E. A. Clark and D. F. Hatch, *The Golden Bough, The Oaken Cross. The Virgilian Cento of Faltonia Betitia Proba* (American Academy of Religion *Texts and Translations* 5: Scholars Press 1981).

will surely have had some effect. The two most predictable responses to greatness are imitation and mockery. Both are present in the centos. To this extent, Crusius greatly overstated the importance of parody in the genre as a whole.[7]

Even the form imparts a kind of authenticity as literature, as the cento preserves the epic form and frequently treats mythological or quasi-epic subjects. There is of course the important exception of Hosidius' tragic drama, but obviously it serves to strengthen the case for a serious tradition. And even the epithalamia of Ausonius and Luxorius,[8] spiced as they are with wit and in Ausonius' case self-deprecation,[9] nevertheless are representatives of a recognized literary tradition. The cento aspires to keep the company of its literary betters, and is much closer to the generic mainstream of literature than other sports of composition.

And yet when these allowances are made, the cento remains for modern readers as it was for Jerome[10] a puzzling and often silly ambition. Proba's evangelical cento brings to mind Dr. Johnson's cheerfully chauvinistic remark: "A woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hinder legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all."

The basic technique of the cento is straightforward enough in theory: the poet patched together[11] verses, or pieces of verses, from Vergil and thereby composed a different poem on an entirely unrelated subject. It was a prodigious feat of memory to keep the entire text of Vergil available in one's mind for quoting. Obviously the centonist will have had a copy of Vergil at hand for verification, but the process depended primarily on summoning phrases and lines entirely out of context: *solae memoriae negotium sparsa colligere et integrare lacerata,* says Ausonius (*praef.* 4). It is astonishing to contemplate the number of poets, over a span of centuries, for whom this exercise was possible: the value placed on the poet whose text was

[7] Crusius (above, n.1). The notion that the cento is essentially parodic is incautiously introduced into most discussions of the form.

[8] *Epithalamium Fridi:* text in Riese—Buecheler, pp. 79-82. The only major treatment of Luxorius is M. Rosenblum, *Luxorius. A Latin Poet Among the Vandals* (New York 1961).

[9] Auson., *c. nupt. praef.*: frivolum et nullius pretii opusculum . . . piget enim Vergiliani carminis dignitatem tam ioculari dehonestasse materia etc.

[10] Jerome, *Epist.* 103. 7: puerilia haec sunt . . . .

[11] Originally κέντρων / cento referred to a patchwork cloak: cf. Crusius 1929-30 for the relevant texts, and Ermini, pp. 19 ff. on the evolution of the word into a literary term. Cf. also W. Belardi, "Nomi del centone nelle lingue indoeuropee," *Ricerche linguistiche* 4 (1958), pp. 29-57; Salanitro, pp. 11 ff.

so sedulously committed to memory can only be compared to modern instances of memorizing the entire Authorized Version of Scriptures. Moreover, it is clear that this feat was accomplished by persons of greatly varying talents, including some—such as Proba and Ausonius—who were in fact capable of original composition as well as making literary patchwork quilts.[12]

The cento has attracted occasional attention over the generations, and has recently become the topic of more extensive investigation.[13] This scholarship has concentrated on the largest specimens of the genre, Proba and Hosidius. I should like to consider a few aspects of the art of the cento with reference to the centos found in the so-called *Latin Anthology* preserved in the Codex Salmasianus (Par. lat. 10318).[14]

This collection, compiled in the last years of the Vandal era in North Africa, contains many poems which may safely be regarded as originating in that region, and from this fact has grown a cumulative likelihood that most of the collection may represent the work of North African writers. The idea is encouraged as well by the pejorative argument that so much of the poetry is so bad that it surely would not have travelled far and still been thought worthy of collecting and preserving. As regards the centos in particular, nearly all the snippets of evidence point to North African origins. Ermini's passing observation that *Alcesta* may have been by an Italian poet does not compel

[12] Comparetti (*Vergil in the Middle Ages* I. p. 53) comments that "to know [Vergil's] works by heart from one end to the other was no uncommon feat," and goes on to assess centonists in these terms: "The idea of such 'Centos' could only have arisen among people who had learnt Vergil mechanically and did not know of any better use to which to put all those verses with which they had loaded their brains."

[13] In addition to Salanitro, Ermini and Delepierre, the major items include B. Borgen, *De centonibus Homericis et Vergilianis* (Hauniae 1828); a series of articles between 1958 and 1960 by Rosa Lamacchia and her recent edition of Hosidius Geta's *Medea* (Leipzig 1981); and Fr. Desbordes, "Le corps étranger. Notes sur le centon en général et la Médée d'Hosidius Geta en particulier" in *Argonautica. Trois études sur l'imitation dans la littérature antique* (Coll. Latomus 159: Bruxelles 1979), pp. 83-108. Salanitro has also announced a major essay, recasting his introductory pages, to appear in *Aufstieg und Niedergang des römischen Welt*. There is a brief discussion in Stemplinger's *Das Plagiat in der griechischen Literatur* (Berlin 1912), pp. 192 ff. For further bibliography see Salanitro, pp. 173-76.

[14] *Anthologia latina sive poesis latinae supplementum*, edd. Fr. Buecheler et A. Riese, I. 1 (Leipzig 1894), pp. 31-296. Centos: pp. 33-82. The MS is perhaps more remembered—and appreciated—for preserving the *Pervigilium Veneris*. It also contains *inter multa alia* the poem of Luxorius and Reposianus' *De concubitu Martis et Veneris*.

assent, and even if true would not greatly weaken the case overall.[15] The centos taken together suggest that they are more likely to be objects of regional interest and pride than of international admiration. A common African origin provides a cohesion to the group offsetting the apparent spread in date of some four centuries from Hosidius in the second century to Luxorius in the sixth.[16] Most of the centos are without evidence of date and thus available for speculation.[17]

The sixth book of the *Anthology* preserves twelve centos in various states of completeness:[18]

7	⟨*De panificio*⟩	11 vv. extant (Riese pp. 33-34)
8	*De alea*	112 vv. (R. 34-38)
9	*Narcissus*	16 vv. (R. 38-39)
10	Mavortius (?): *Iudicium Paridis*	42 vv. (ending lost) (R. 39-41)
11	*Hippodamia*	164 vv. extant (R. 41-47)
12	*Hercules et Antaeus*	16 vv. (R. 47)
13	*Progne et Philomela*	24 vv. (R. 48)
14	*Europa*	34 vv. extant (R. 49-50)
15	*Alcesta*	162 vv. extant (R. 50-56)
16	Mavortius (?): *De ecclesia*	111 vv. extant[19] (R. 56-61)
17	Hosidius Geta: *Medea*	461 vv. (R. 61-79)
18	Luxorius: *Epithalamium Fridi*	68 vv. (R. 79-82)

To these we may add for the purposes of the discussion which follows:

Ausonius : *Cento nuptialis*	131 vv.
Pomponius, *Versus ad gratiam Domini*	132 vv. (*CSEL* XVI, pp. 609-15)
De Verbi incarnatione	111 vv. (*CSEL* XVI, pp. 615-20)
Proba, *De laudibus Christi*	666 vv.[20]

Taken together, these poems provide an interesting basis for observing differences in the ways a poet could handle his source

[15] The author of *Alcesta* (R. 50-56) addresses Apollo as *summi custos Soractis* (19). But this is after all a Vergilian address to Apollo (actually V. has *sancti: Aen.* XI. 785), and Vergil's Italian status is not at issue.

[16] Hosidius is dated on the assumption that our cento is indeed the *Medea* cento mentioned by Tertullian, *de praescr. haer.* 39. 5, as the work of a poet whose name is actually garbled in the MSS (Vosidius, Ovidius etc). Luxorius makes specific references to Vandals which permit a dating near the compilation itself.

[17] See Schenkl (above n.6), pp. 509 ff. for some considerations: Ermini, pp. 42 ff.; Salanitro, pp. 36 ff.

[18] I use the numbers in R(iese). The centos comprised Book VI of the *Anthology* as originally compiled.

[19] Plus a six-line post-script not included in this discussion.

[20] Excluding the 29-line prologue, which is only partially centonic.

material. I shall briefly touch on three questions: ① What rules are stated or deducible for the composition of a cento; ② To what extent were these rules followed by the centonists; ③ Is it possible to make distinctions of authorship or of date on the basis of adherence to or departure from these rules?

Ausonius provides the clearest and most familiar instructions for the centonist:

> Variis de locis sensibusque diversis quaedam carminis structura solidatur, in unum versum ut coeant aut caesi duo aut unus et sequens medius cum medio. nam duos iunctim locare ineptum est, et tres una serie merae nugae. diffinduntur autem per caesuras omnes quas recipit versus heroicus, convenire ut possit aut penthemimeris cum reliquo anapaestico, aut trochaice cum posteriore segmento, aut septem sem- ipedes cum anapaestico chorico, aut ⟨sequatur⟩ post dactylum atque semipedem quidquid restat hexametro. (Praef. 25-32 Prete)

From this account we may derive the following rules of the game:

ⓐ The juncture within a line should only occur at the places where a caesura is permitted in Vergil: ‾‿‿‾ ‖ etc.; ‾‿‿‾‿‿ ‖ etc.; ‾‿‿‿‿‿ ‖ etc.; and ‾‿‿‿‿‿‿ ‖ etc. There should not be pieces of other sizes than those which caesurae create.

ⓑ If a line does not consist of a Vergilian verse reused in its entirety, it should consist of two pieces and no more.

ⓒ The longest continuous quotation approved is 1½ verses (whatever exact meaning *medius* may bear).

ⓓ The components should present the text of Vergil unchanged, although the meaning of the words may be altered by their new context.

The simplest way to set forth the extent to which the centonists followed or ignored the rules I have described is to tabulate the data as in Table 1, which gives for each poem: the total lines (col. 1); the number (and percentage) of lines which are taken whole from Vergil (col. 2); composed of 2 Vergilian sources (col. 3); composed of 3 or 4 pieces (col. 4); containing additions by the centonist—as distinct from Vergilian text which has been altered (col. 5); and the number of instances of quotations extending unbroken for more than 1½ verses (col. 6).

Obviously whenever a line is built of 3 (or even 4) components, the metrical control described by Ausonius has been ignored (note that Ausonius himself did not exercise this freedom). Oddly, Ausonius does not mention using isolated whole lines, but it is of course a principal option, generally accounting for one-fourth to one-third of

TABLE 1 – COMPOSITION OF VERSES

POEM	1 Total Lines	2 Whole Lines No.	%	3 2-Source Lines No.	%	4 3+ Sources No.	%	5 Original Add. No.	%	6 Longer Than 1½ consec.
De panificio	11	1	9.1	10	90.9	0	0	0	0	0
De alea	112	27	24.1	70	62.5	10	8.9	5	4.5	0
Narcissus	16	3	18.75	13	81.25	0	0	0	0	0
Iudicium Paridis	42	14	33.3	28	66.7	0	0	0	0	1
Hippodamia	164	36	22.0	126	76.8	1	0.6	1	0.6	0
Heracles & Antaeus	16	3	18.75	13	81.25	0	0	0	0	0
Progne & Philomela	24	0	0	20	83.3	3	12.5	1	4.2	0
Europa	34	7	20.6	27	79.4	0	0	0	0	0
Alcesta	162	59	36.4	101	62.4	0	0	2	1.2	1
Epithalamium Fridi	68	37	54.4	27	39.7	3	4.4	1	1.5	4
De ecclesia	111	30	27.0	65	58.6	11	10.0	5	4.5	2
Cento nuptialis	131	48	36.6	83	63.4	0	0	0	0	1
Ad gratiam Domini	132	52	39.4	75	56.8	4	3.0	1	0.8	5
De Verbi incarnatione	111	43	38.7	60	54.1	7	6.3	0	0	3
Hosidius: Medea*	364	124	34.1	236	64.8	2	0.6	0	0	2
Proba (excl. prolog.)	666	251	37.7	400	60.1	15	2.2	0	0	7
MEAN			28.2		67.9		2.8		1.1	

* I.e. excluding the choral passages, which consist of paroemiacs, and counting all dialogue whether the lines are complete or not.

all lines. As this proportion increases, so does the temptation to use consecutive complete verses of Vergil, the opposite fault from excessive fragmentation. This Ausonius does only once (c. nupt. 25-26 = Aen. VI. 645-46).

The normal distribution for all centos is: approximately one-third complete Vergilian verses, and slightly less than two-thirds verses comprising two segments. Verses containing three or more elements, including non-Vergilian material, account for only about one in forty lines. Against this background, we may observe some exceptions.

It is hardly surprising that *De panificio* has almost no complete Vergilian verses, as the subject matter is so far from Vergil. But the author is not unskilled, and has made minimal changes in the lines he has used. The same cannot be said for *Progne et Philomela*, whose author has not succeeded in using a single complete verse of Vergil, and yet has frequently failed to make coherent sense by the composite verses he has built. Moreover, as if further proof of his clumsiness were needed, he has three lines of 3 parts and one with an addition where the line would not work. The deviations for *Narcissus* and *Hercules et Antaeus* are not significant, since one more complete verse would move them into the average range.

At the other end of the spectrum is Luxorius. More than half of his lines are lifted entire from Vergil (many with modifications). His thoughts very often move in units of one line, and he apparently hunted through Vergil on this basis. He is also fond of using two full lines. He has the highest frequency of two-line quotations among the centonists, notably including lines 23-28 consisting of three successive couplets (*Aen.* VI. 646-47; I. 707-08; I. 663-64). Considering the fact that Luxorius is clearly imitating Ausonius' epithalamium in this poem,[21] and thus had presumably read the earlier poet's strictures against such practices, this feature is even more surprising. Yet there are effective touches, and it is not altogether fair to complain (as do Schenkl and Ermini) that he sinks below his usual level of talent—a harsh statement.

The extreme is found in *Ad gratiam Domini*: on three occasions, the poet has followed Vergil continuously for more than two lines (14-15-16a; 32-33-34a; 46b-47-48a). But in each instance, the poet is expressing—or preserving Vergil's way of expressing—a single thought of real importance to his theme, and this would seem to justify the "violation" of the rules.

But the most skillful centonist of all is the author of *Europa*. That

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[21] So Luxorius borrows many of the same lines as Ausonius, sometimes for a similar purpose. Cf. Schenkl, p. 553, note 1 for a list.

poet has a rather high proportion of two-source lines (nearly 80%) and commensurately fewer whole lines. There are no three-piece lines and none with original phrases inserted by the poet. Moreover, he never even extends a quotation from one line into the next: there are no quotations involving enjambement, and no successive lines linked by a shared quotation. No other centonist comes close to this level of virtuosity. And on top of this, the cento reads smoothly and the story is presented coherently.

On the other hand, if we look at the frequency of verses composed of 3 or 4 elements, three poems stand out. In *De alea* this occurs once in every eleven lines, and there are five more with non-Vergilian fillers. Many lines are unintelligible or startlingly clumsy, as if the author could not find or make a proper way to express his thoughts. The problem seems to be not so much the thoughts as the poet, however. The poem is parodic in tone, but quite without sophistication.

Progne et Philomela has a "failure rate" of one in six lines, as noted earlier, and is altogether deplorable. As for *De ecclesia*, the problem lines amount to one in seven. This is attributable, at least in part, to the subject matter. Mavortius is a talented poet who has chosen a topic far from Vergil (a Christian liturgical event, complete with summaries of the Gospel). Because of this specialized theme, and because of his desire to sound as much like the Scriptures as possible, he is driven to alter and chop the Vergilian source material. Many of his full lines are bland or generic, and when this approach would not serve, Mavortius was driven most of the time to alter or splice. The poem reads far more smoothly than one might expect, and earns admiration for ingenuity different from *Europa* but perhaps no less demanding.[22]

We might expect that Proba would show signs of a similar problem, but she does not (total aberrations: 2.2%, or average). But her poem is more narrative and more adapted to the epic style, including modelling Jesus to some extent on the heroic Aeneas.[23] As a result, she takes more complete verses unaltered (about 3 in every eight lines). But they are not evenly distributed: when she turns to more

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[22] On *De eccl.* and other Christian centos, cf. J.-L. Vidal, "Observaciones sobre centones virgilianos de tema cristiano," *Boletín del Inst. de Estudios helénicos* 3 (1973), pp. 53-64. The difficulty of Mavortius' task is reflected in the enthusiastic addendum with its prefatory "Cumque Mavortio clamaretur 'Maro iuniori' ad praesens hoc recitavit" etc.

[23] On this adaptation cf. Clark and Hatch in *Vergilius* 27 (1981), pp. 31-39 (some dubious statements, but an interesting approach).

specifically Christian themes she has fewer complete lines and more composite. The section on the fratricide of Cain, the anger of God, the age of iron and the Flood (285-312) in which 17 of the 28 verses are complete Vergilian lines, stands in contrast with the passage on the birth of Christ, the Magi and the slaughter of the Innocents (346-79), where only 5 of 34 verses are intact.

On the basis of these numbers, it would be risky to assert that any two centos *are* the work of the same poet, but it would seem more probable that the reverse is sometimes indicated. Surely *Progne et Philomela* and *Iudicium Paridis* are by different authors, and more significant perhaps are the differences between *Iudicium Paridis* and *De ecclesia*, both attributed to Mavortius. So also *Alcesta* and *Hippodamia*, which share other features such as halting sentence structure and a similar distribution of sources across the three Vergilian works,[24] show very different profiles when considered from the perspective of how they put their verses together. Luxorius can be seen as an aberration and Ausonius as something of a purist. There is apparently no clear-cut distinction between African and European practice, nor between early and late, although metrical howlers are somewhat less frequent in the later examples than in Hosidius. A Christian theme presented special difficulties, reflected in a greater frequency of multi-source lines and additions to the text.

Obviously it was not always possible for the centonist to keep Vergil's words unchanged. There are several types of alterations introduced. First, minor alterations in forms required to preserve syntax (*trahit* becomes *trahunt*). These are very frequent and presumably do not count against a centonist's faithfulness to his original. Second, the poet may find it necessary to adjust the sense of a borrowed phrase by replacement of a single word. Some of these are clever and perhaps pointed; e.g. Mavortius, *De eccl.* 18, in speaking of the birth of Jesus uses *Aen.* VII. 660 on the birth of Aventinus, son of Hercules and Rhea (*mixta deo mulier*):

furtivum partu sub luminis edidit oras

becomes

[24] The distribution of the centonists' source-lines over the three Vergilian works is the topic of a separate study now under preparation. The topic is also of some use in identifying differences in approach. For present purposes, I will note that *Alcesta* contains 254 Vergilian quotations distributed thus: *Aen.* 238 (94%), *Geor.* 9 (3.5%), *Ecl.* 7 (2.5%); *Hipp.* has 270: *Aen.* 249 (92%), *Geor.* 13 (5%), *Ecl.* 8 (3%). These numbers should be seen against the relative bulk of the three Vergilian works: *Aen.* = 76.6%, *Geor.* = 17%, *Ecl.* = 6.4%.

quem nobis partu sub luminis edidit oras,

thus facing, challenging and improving upon the pagan story of the woman giving birth to the son of a god.

Or again, the change may be in proper names. Treating specific myths meant that the centonist often needed to use the names of the characters involved, and impenetrable obscurity could result from failing to accommodate this need (*Hippodamia* for example suffers grievously from this). *Europa* 3 by a felicitous substitution takes *Ecl.* VI. 46 and replaces one bull-related heroine by another:

Europam nivei solatur amore iuvenci.

A particularly ingenious case is Luxorius, *Epithalamium Fridi* 48-49. The poet borrows Juno's words (*Aen.* IV. 102-03) inciting Venus to her plan for uniting Dido and Aeneas:

communem hunc ergo populum paribusque regamus
auspiciis: liceat *Phrygio* servire marito

and puts the words into Venus' mouth as she addresses Amor (the first half of 48 is from *Aen.* I. 688, an exactly parallel scene to this):

occultum inspires ignem paribusque regamus
auspiciis: liceat *Frido* servire marito.

Vergil's words are used *sensibus diversis*, says Ausonius. One striking example will serve to illustrate this phenomenon which is woven through the entire fabric of the centos. It also falls under the heading of proper name adaptation. Hosidius takes *Geor.* II. 126, *Media fert tristis sucos*, referring to the region of Media, and uses it (*Medea* 191) unchanged to refer to the Colchian princess mixing her poisons. We are apparently to think of Μήδεια with its proparoxytone being reproduced by this word.

Two other kinds of change amount to admissions of defeat. One is to add new text not found in Vergil, and thus only borrow part of a verse. *De ecclesia* 45, for instance, takes the first half of *Aen.* III. 519 (*dat clarum e caelo signum*), and then lamely fills the line with *nam tempore in illo*, which does not occur thus anywhere in Vergil. This step of simply adding non-Vergilian pieces is not common, and is found in only 7 of the centos under review. The worst offenders as noted earlier are *De alea* and *De ecclesia*, both of which topics may have presented their poets with intractable problems (although the instance just cited is hardly an obscure or specialized thought!). A kindred fault is to move a borrowed phrase to a new position in the

line when there is no available piece in the only open position (e.g. *Iudicium Paridis* 15: cf. *Aen.* VI. 562).

All these considerations suggest how complex an activity it was to compose a cento. Ausonius' sketch of the rules implies a far clearer picture than is actually the case. As with other poetic activities, we may discern differences of style, of method and of ability. Differentiations which are not evident from reading the centos begin to emerge from analyzing the centonists' treatment of their sources.

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