Manuel Baumbach (Ed.)

Cento-Texts in the Making

Aesthetics and Poetics of Cento-Techniques
from Homer to *Zong!*

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Preface

The present volume focusses on different cento-techniques as forms of writing. Such forms are not only characteristic of texts that have been labelled *centones* according to a specific (historical) definition of cento as a piece of literature (mostly a poem), which is composed either wholly or in most parts of quotations from the literary tradition. They can be also found in all literary genres, inasmuch smaller parts of texts are composed by way of weaving together pieces from other works.

The focus on different cento-techniques from Antiquity to the present day allows us to concentrate on the *poiesis* of the texts discussed as well as on poetological reflections, which are often linked with or even inscribed in the usage of cento-techniques. All contributions discuss ways of selection and combination of quotations in order to learn more about the specific form of intertextual writing in cento-texts. How far does it differ from other forms of intertextuality given that all texts are in constant dialogue with the (spoken and) literary tradition as described by Michail Bachtin and Julia Kristeva? Are there other literary theories that can be discussed with regard to cento-techniques? As the 'new' cento-text alters the texts (and contexts) of the pieces used there is a special focus on aspects of parody, travesty and allusion. Furthermore, cento-techniques are closely linked to the concepts of collecting (λέγειν, *légein*) and weaving (*texere*, *textum*), which are at the core of composing (and reflecting upon) literature from Antiquity onwards. We ask which metaphors or concepts are used to describe cento-techniques (e.g. bees, weaving, hooking, bricolage), we raise questions of authorship and authorization, and we take a look at the question how cento-techniques stress certain parts, verses, intertextual links as important for intertextual analysis. The interdisciplinary approach of this volume enables us to compare different cultural traditions and helps to approach cento-techniques from an aesthetical point of view. Can we speak of an aesthetics of imperfection or absence as there is always something missing or hidden, which has not been selected?

The present volume stems from an international conference held in Bochum from 13.11.2020 to 14.11.2020. It contains revised versions of the papers presented at the conference as well as additional contributions inspired by the discussions. The arrangement of the contributions is 'centonic' insofar they are neither ordered chronologically nor according to specific topics. Rather, they form a patchwork, which invites the reader to compare different methodological approaches of reading cento-texts.

I would like to thank all contributors for most stimulating discussions. The conference and the publication of this volume was funded by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG) as part of the project on '*Christus Patiens* and the Greek Cento poetry', which is hosted at the Ruhr-University Bochum. For their assistance with the publication and their guidance in the editing process I am endebted to Anna Wheeler and especially to Theo Lindken.

Bochum, December 2021   Manuel Baumbach

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Selecting, Cutting and Weaving Texts:
The Poiesis of Cento-Writings

A cento is not a rose. A cento is cento is κέντρων – a blanket sewn together from different cloth flaps, which was used in antiquity as a means of fire-fighting (*ad ignem prohibendum vel extinguendum*, TLL s.v. cento 1, Sp. 821,17) and, in a figurative sense, denoted a certain narrative or poetry through the image of a patchwork quilt.[1] Their poiesis in the Aristotelian sense of 'being made'[2] consists in creating a new text from set pieces of one or more texts.[3] This technique probably originates from oral poetry and could go back to the use of iterated verses, i.e. (at least once) repeated verses, in Archaic epic poetry. Such verse repetitions are numerous in the Homeric epics. On the one hand, they refer to a formulaic composition or improvisation method of early epic poetry, with which similar actions or descriptions of figures or objects could be designed in varying repetition.[4] On the other hand, in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, especially those iterated verses that occur only twice in the individual epics can be used as intratextual references to establish links between different narrative strands.[5] Against this background, it is significant that in later reception a speech from the *Iliad* was associated with the ancient cento-poetry:

> Οὕτω διόλου τὴν δημηγορίαν τοῦ Γλαύκου ὁ ποιητὴς κέντρωνος δίκην ἀπὸ ἐννοιῶν ἀλλαχοῦ ῥηθεισῶν συνέρραψε, κατὰ τὰ ὕστερον δηλαδὴ Ὁμηρόκεντρα.[6]

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1   For the history of the concept cf. GLEI (2006). For the metaphorical usage of patchwork as a form of poetry see *Commentaria in Dionysii Thracis Artem Grammaticam, Scholia Londinensia partim excerpta ex Heliodoro*, p. 481 HILGARD (1901): καὶ ὥσπερ κέντρων λέγεται περιβόλαιον τὸ ἐκ διαφόρων ῥακῶν συγκείμενον, οὕτω καὶ τὰ ἐκ διαφόρων ἐπῶν συγκείμενα νοήματα κέντρωνες καλοῦνται. – "And just as a patchwork fabric is said to be a blanket made from different patches, so the poems made from different words are called *kentrones*."

2   In Aristotle, poiesis denotes both the process of production and what is produced itself. On the distinction between practice and poiesis in Aristotle see EBERT (1976).

3   Cf. the definition of Ausonius in the *Cento nuptialis*, praef. 14: *Variis de locis sensibusque diversis quaedam carminis structura solidatur ...* "It is a poem compactly built out of a variety of passages and different meanings ..." All translations from Ausonius are taken from EVELYN WHITE (1919).

4   See Schmidt 1885, VIII, who counts a total of 1804 literally repeating verses in Homer. For a definition of 'iterata' in early Greek epic cf. STRASSER (1984:7-24).

5   Cf. PUCCI (1987:242).

6   Eustathius, *Commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem* 17,156, p. 1099, 51. He defines cento-poetry as the sewing together of originally spaced verses to form a new poem (εἰς ἓν), see *Commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem* 1,10. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.

> Likewise, the poet has sewn together the speech of Glaucus from thoughts expressed elsewhere like a cento, apparently in manner of later Homeric centos.

The speech of the Lycian king Glaucus to Hector (*Iliad* 17.142-168) is composed in parts of verses from the speeches of Sarpedon to Hector (*Iliad* 5.472-492 and 684-688) and Achilles to Odysseus (*Iliad* 9.308-429).[7] Due to the fact that it is a speech, i.e. a self-contained piece of text put into the mouth of a figure as a rhetorical composition, a technique comparable to later Homeric centos is used on a small scale: Just as Glaucus' speech intertextually refers back to verse parts already used in other speeches of the epos, poets of Homeric centos lay down intertextual traces to the Homeric epics by combining verses from the *Iliad* and/or *Odyssey* into a new poem, i.e. a Homeric cento with its own theme.

It is up to the recipients to recognize the dialogue between the poems or parts of poems and to make it fruitful for the understanding of the receiving and/or received texts. In case of speeches, monologues or dialogue sections, the question arises as to whether intra- or intertextual traces can be intentionally assigned to the speaking characters or not. Since Glaucus in the fiction of the plot of the *Iliad* has not heard the other speeches of which his own speech is composed in parts, the cento-technique cannot be explained by a specific character intention. Rather, the verse repetitions are possible intratextual traces, which invite the recipients to compare the different speeches and speakers in the *Iliad*. However, it must be noted that not every verse repetition is an intertextual trace and that not every intertextual trace has the same significance for the understanding of the text. Leaving apart the special case of formulaic language in early Greek epic poetry, one of the basic problems of intertextuality is whether and to what extent the use of a word or a sequence of words or a verse that has already been attested in the literary tradition opens up a meaningful or intended dialogue between texts or parts of texts. Based on Julia Kristeva's basic assumption that texts are mosaics of quotations, and on Gérard Genette's definition of intertextuality as the presence of a text in another as a form of transtextuality the degree of the relationship between texts is reassessed in the communication process between text, reader and the text or texts called up in the text. In this context, cento-texts represent an extreme case of intertextuality in that their poiesis consists entirely or largely in the adoption of verses or elements from earlier texts. These elements can take on new meaning in new contexts. At the same time, they can refer back to their original meanings and contexts. Intertextuality is thus the key characteristic of cento-texts as patchworks, that exhibit their artificiality as well as artistry and thus enable reflections on the cento-technique itself.[8]

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7   See MOULTON (1981).

8   On the connection between textiles and the reflection on the poiesis of texts see KRUGER (2001:31): "In literature the presence of a textile as well as a weaving scene always refers to two things: the production of literature (i.e., the text in which this smaller scene occurs) and the history of that production (i.e., the text's relationship to the textile). Regarding this four-way relationship (literature/text/text/textile), the production of fabric