

Anke Rondholz
The Versatile Needle

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The Versatile Needle

Hosidius Geta's Cento *Medea*
and Its Tradition

by

Anke Rondholz

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Prolegomena

In the Fall of 2004 I took a seminar on Vergilian centos at the Ruhr Universität Bochum. I have to admit that initially I was perplexed: patchwork poems? Exclusively stitched together from lines of Vergil? Why don't these centonists write their own poetry?! Very soon, however, I was fascinated by the creativity and complexity of these Vergilian patchwork poems – not only does the composition of a cento require immense technical skills and a profound knowledge of Vergil (or whatever text one chooses as the source), but the technique also allows the author to engage in a dialogue with the primary text and to add another dimension of meaning to his poem. This fascination has stayed with me ever since, and has borne fruit in form of this dissertation. I would like to thank my supervisors John Matthews and Christina Kraus for their guidance and feedback, as well as to everyone at the Yale Classics Department for their support during my time there.

This study falls into two parts: first it is concerned with the ancient cento in general. I look at its possible origins and at the ancient conception of this art form. Then I turn to the case study of the cento-tragedy *Medea* commonly attributed to a certain Hosidius Geta. I chose this piece for various reasons. It is one of the longest and one of the most complex centos that we have, and it is also one of the earliest extant specimen. Besides, it is intriguing in terms of its subject matter: the Medea myth has a long tradition, and it is exciting to see how Geta reacts to and interacts with his literary predecessors. Finally, the ancient cento and Geta's *Medea* in particular have not received much attention among scholars, which is why this study offered the opportunity to contribute to the discussion of a still relatively unexplored form of art. Fortunately, in the last ten years a new interest in the cento has grown. In 1998 Mark David Usher published a book on the cento of the Empress Eudocia, and

in 2005 Scott McGill's study of the pagan Latin centos came out.¹ Especially among Italian scholars the cento has become a more popular subject of research: in 2002, Gabriella Carbone published a new edition of the cento *De Alea*, in 2007 Giovanni Salanitro published a new edition of the cento *Alcesta*, and several articles on various centos came out in Italian journals.²

Geta's *Medea*, however, is a widely unknown text even among classicists. Two critical editions were published in 1981, of which Rosa Lamacchia's authoritative edition by Teubner is now available from De Gruyter on demand only. It was translated twice: there is Joseph Mooney's verse translation from 1919, and an Italian translation by Salanitro from 1981. Therefore I provide the Latin text and a new English translation. There are several articles on various aspects of Geta's cento (five of them alone by Lamacchia, all from the year 1958),³ and Salanitro's edition with the aforementioned translation and a brief introduction on the history of the cento in antiquity. There is, however, no comprehensive study of the text. In general, the *Medea* is regarded as mediocre.⁴ Since the main

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- 1 Usher 1998, *Homeric Stitchings: the Homeric Centos of the Empress Eudocia*; McGill 2005, *Vergil Recomposed. The Mythological and Secular Centos in Antiquity*. McGill also published an article on Geta's *Medea* in 2002, "Tragic Virgil: Rewriting Virgil as a Tragedy in the Cento *Medea*", and an article on the Christian *Versus ad Gratiam Domini* in 2001, "Poeta Arte Christianus: Pomponius's Cento *Versus ad Gratiam Domini* as an Early Example of Christian Bucolic".
 - 2 Most importantly Moretti 2008, "Proba e il 'Cento nuptialis' di Ausonio"; Fassina 2007, "Ipotesi sul centone cristiano 'De ecclesia'"; Giampiccolo 2007, "Osservazioni preliminari sul centone virgiliano 'De verbi incarnatione'", 2007.
 - 3 Lamacchia 1958a-e: "Dall'arte allusiva al centone"; "Metro e ritmo nella 'Medea' di Osidio Geta"; "Osservazioni sulle sigle dei personaggi e le rubriche nella *Medea* di Osidio Geta"; "Problemi di interpretazione semantica in un centone virgiliano"; "Tecnica centonaria e critica del testo".
 - 4 See such statements as Regel 1866, p. 3: "tam enim insulsum et ineptum hoc carminum genus esse videtur, ut indignum putandum sit, in quo quis studium collocet. neque haec, de qua scripturus sum, *Medea* maioris cuiusdam, qua ceteros eiusmodi centones superet, elegantiae habet commendationem"; Ermini 1909, p. 48: "Non me sembra tuttavia da negare ad Osidio una certa esperienza poetica e una sufficiente cultura, che si mostra nell'aver egli superato, con agevolezza, difficoltà di paensiero e di forma, constretto all'imitazione del soggetto, già trattato da altri, e al lessico

subject of this study is the Vergilian cento, I focus on Geta's cento technique and on his interaction with the Vergilian text. An analysis of the relationship between the *Medea* and the works of Vergil has not been done before; it gives much new insight and reveals the high degree of sophistication that is behind the composition of the piece. In the final chapter I give a brief outlook on Geta's place in the *Medea* tradition. The results allow for a re-evaluation of Geta's *Medea*. Not only is it an innovative and witty tragedy on its own, which is self-conscious of the literary tradition, but for the educated reader of Vergil and his intertexts the original context of the verse-units employed opens up another level of understanding. Geta's cento is far from mediocre – innovative and sophisticated in both technique and content, it deserves to be taken seriously as a *Medea* tragedy.

vergiliano"; Dane 1950, p. 75: "... the metrical infelicities, which are numerous, and the general grossness of the composition"; Desbordes 1979, p. 92: "... une *Medée*, médiocre c'est entendu ..."; Kroll 1913, col. 2489-90: "Bei diesem Verfahren ist es ohne arge Übelstände nicht abgegangen. Es finden sich schlimme Hiäte ... namentlich aber fehlerhafte Verse ... Daß es auch an syntaktischen und sachlichen Anstößen nicht fehlt, versteht sich von selbst. Das literarische Niveau ist sehr niedrig".

Chapter 1

Origin and Development of the Cento

1.1 The Greek Cento

1.1.1 Precursors of the Greek Cento: Rhapsody and Pastiche

The Greek word κέντρον denotes any sharp point, a “goad”, “prick” or a “needle”. κέντρων, then, specifies something that has been marked by a κέντρον and can mean “piece of needlework” or “piece of patchwork”.⁵ The Latin loanword *cento* is first used as a literary metaphor by Plautus in the phrase *centones sarcire*,⁶ which roughly translates to the English expression “to spin a yarn”.⁷ In reference to a patchwork poem, stitched together from the lines and half-lines from another author’s work, the term is first attested in Tertullian’s *Prescription against the Heretics: Homerocentones etiam vocare solent qui de carminibus Homeri propria opera more centonario ex multis hinc inde compositis in unum sarciunt corpus*.⁸ The technique by which such poems are composed is compared to the work of a *centonarius*, a quilt maker.

Because of its etymology, the term was associated by some scholiasts with ῥαψωδία, which probably comes from ῥάπτειν (“to sew” or “stitch together”) and ἀοιδή (“song”).⁹ In the introduction to his

5 LSJ s.v.

6 Pl. *Epid.* 455.

7 Usher 1998, pp. 1-2.

8 Tert. *prae.* 39,5. For the discussion of the textual-critical problems with this passage see 1.2.

9 See Hes. fr. 357, 1-2, ἐγὼ καὶ Ὅμηρος ἀοιδοὶ / μέλπομεν, ἐν νεαροῖς ὕμνοισι ῥάψαντες ἀοιδήν; Pin. *Nem.* 2,2, ῥαπτῶν ἐπέων ἀοιδοί.

commentary on Homer, Eustathius, a Byzantine rhetorician from the twelfth century, lays out the possible derivations of ῥαψωδία.¹⁰ After dismissing ῥάβδος, “staff, wand”,¹¹ he quotes Pindar’s *Nemean Ode* 2,2, ῥαπτῶν ἐπέων ἀοιδοί, to show that the rhapsodes received their name from the verb ῥάπτειν. The singers of Homer “sewed” or “stitched” together (συνέρραπτον) the scattered episodes of the Homeric epics “as they wished” (ὡς ἐβούλοντο),¹² or as Eustathius says a few sentences later, “appropriate to the occasion at hand, be it a wedding or a festival”.¹³ Then he illustrates this process of sewing together: “of such a stitching”, he says, “a clear example are the pieces of patchwork [κέντρωνες], the so-called *Homerokentra*”. Pieces of patchwork are so called because they are textiles that are sewn together from different colors (presumably fabrics of different color), and correspondingly too, the *Homerokentra*, “Homeric patchwork compilations”.¹⁴

Eustathius comments on the topic κέντρων in two more instances. In his note on *Iliad* 17,166 he states that the Glaucus-speech is “sewn together” (ὁ ποιητῆς κέντρωνος δίκην ἀπὸ ἐννοιῶν ἀλλαξοῦ ῥηθειςῶν συνέρραψε) in the likeness of a κέντρων.¹⁵ On *Iliad* 23,430, Antilochus goading his horses, Eustathius explains that it is from such a κέντρον that both sewn (ῥαπτόμενοι) and written (γραφόμενοι) patchworks get their name. Then he compares the process of compiling written κέντρωνες, namely compiling “different parts of poems and lines from different sources”, to the grafting onto trees (ἐγκεντρίζειν) or to the embroidering of textile patchworks.¹⁶

These passages have led scholars to think that the origin of the cento lay in early rhapsody.¹⁷ In the first two passages mentioned above, however, Eustathius actually compares the practice

10 Eust. 6.

11 οἶονεἰ ῥάβδος, Eust. 6,4. Today this derivation is considered morphologically untenable, see Ford 1988, p. 300.

12 Eust. 6,16-24.

13 Eust. 6,28-9.

14 τῆς ῥάψεως παράδειγμα σαφὲς καὶ οἱ κέντρωνες, τουτέστι τὰ λεγόμενα Ὀμηρόκεντρα. κέντρωνές τε γὰρ κυρίως λέγονται τὰ ἐκ διαφόρων χροῶν συνερραμμένα εἰς ἓν, οἷς ὁμοιώνται πῶς τὰ Ὀμηρόκεντρα, Eust. 6,26-7.

15 Eust. 1099,50-3.

16 Eust. 1308,62-8.

17 See Crusius 1899, followed by e.g. Salanitro 1981, pp. 13-15, Liebermann

of ῥαψῳδία to cento-technique, be it textile or written patchworks. The scholiast and his audience are so far away from the early rhapsodes (and also the latest attested rhapsodic competitions in the third century AD),¹⁸ that the term not only needs an explanation, but must also be illustrated by the comparison to a contemporary genre. The genre that comes closest in technique *and* etymology to rhapsody for Eustathius is that of the *Homerokentra*, which get their name from textile patchworks sewn together – just as ῥαψῳδία also means stitching. In the third passage on the derivation of κέντρων and ἐγκεντρίζειν from κέντρον Eustathius’ interest is merely etymological. Thus, presumably based on etymology, κέντρωνες are used to give Eustathius’ readers an understanding of rhapsody.

The discussion about the etymology of ῥαψῳδία and its connection with the κέντρωνες had been going on for several centuries. In the seventh century Heliodorus in his commentary on Dionysius Thrax explains that rhapsody is said to be a song stitched together from different Homeric themes (ἐκ διαφόρων τόπων Ὀμηρικῶν ἐρραμμένην). Then he quotes a six-line Homeric cento about Echo and Pan and points out that, if this derivation of ῥαψῳδία were correct, the little Homeric passage would be called ῥαψῳδία. In fact, says Heliodorus, such compositions are called κέντρωνες, and he goes on to explain the parallel between a textile and a written piece of patchwork.¹⁹ Heliodorus prefers ῥάβδος as the origin of ῥαψῳδία, as he says several lines later, going back to the laurel staff that the singers of Homer had.²⁰ So Heliodorus associates rhapsody with the cento for etymological reasons but dismisses the connection because of what in his opinion is an incorrect derivation.

M. D. Usher’s suggestion, that the “Homeric cento poet is a successor to the ancient rhapsode”,²¹ is based on the idea that the

and Gärtner 1996 and Usher 1998, pp. 19-31 who wants to demonstrate Eudocia’s place in the rhapsodic tradition.

18 See West 1981, p. 114.

19 Ἄλλ’ εἰ τοῦτο ἦν ἀληθές, αὐτὰ ἂν μόνα ἐκαλεῖτο ῥαψῳδία, καὶ οὐκέτι τὰ τάξιν Ὀμήρου. Εἴρηται δὲ τὰ τοιαῦτα κέντρωνες· καὶ ὥσπερ κέντρων λέγεται περιβόλαιον τὸ ἐκ διαφόρων ῥακῶν συγκείμενον, οὕτω καὶ τὰ ἐκ διαφόρων ἐπῶν συγκείμενα νοήματα κέντρωνες καλοῦνται, Hilgard 1901, p. 480; see also Usher 1998, p. 25.

20 Hilgard 1901, p. 481.

21 Usher 1998, p. 29.

archaic rhapsodes recited Homer and other texts from memory and that they were believed to have patched up borrowed lines and passages from the same or other poems into the text they were reciting.²² This reserved sense of ῥαψωδός, however, developed much later to differentiate between the creative ἀοιδοί and their unoriginal heirs, the rhapsodes. No distinction between original singers and imitative rhapsodes can be attributed to the archaic age, when ῥαψωδία referred to the performance of poetry without μέλος, as A. Ford has pointed out.²³ Given the fact that the information provided by the scholiasts on early or even later rhapsodic practice is not trustworthy, there is no basis for regarding the Homeric cento poets as successors to the rhapsodes.

Finally, the comparison between ῥαψωδία and κέντρων made by Heliodorus and Eustathius does not hold, although for different reasons than the one given by Heliodorus. ῥαψωδία as stitching was understood as a sequence of Homeric episodes.²⁴ A cento, on the other hand, as Ausonius describes it in his letter to Axius Paulus, is stitched together from single lines and half-lines.²⁵

Since the theory that the cento's origin goes back to early rhapsody cannot be proven (and is arguably false), the question remains: where did this literary form originate?

The pastiche is regarded as an early precursor of the cento in the sense of single lines stitched together. Pastiche is the French form of the Greco-Roman dish *pasticcio*, a kind of pie made from various ingredients. The literary pastiche is cobbled together in imitation of several original works, often to parodistic effect.²⁶ Early examples of such literary 'hodge-podges' can be found in Aristophanes' *Peace* lines 1089-93; 1270-74 and 1282-87, and in the *Frogs* 1264-68; 1285-95 and 1309-22. In the passages from the *Peace* Aristophanes parodies epic by having his characters quote both Homer-like verses

22 Usher 1998, p. 26 based on schol. Pi. N. 2,1c.

23 Ford 1988.

24 E.g. D. T., *Ars Grammatica* 5, Melampus ad loc. Usher 1998, pp. 26-27 sees the fact that Eudocia's cento also "unfolds as a chain of episodes" as another proof that she stands in the rhapsodic tradition.

25 Aus. *praef. cent. nupt.* I use the word "cento" in the Ausonian sense. For a discussion on the definition of the cento see 2.

26 OED s.v.

and actual Homeric verses. In the passages from the *Frogs* lines from Euripides and Aeschylus are mixed with lines imitating their tragic styles. It is debatable whether these passages are better regarded as centos or pastiches. Given the fact that Aristophanes does not compile passages from alien texts completely but mixes quotations with his own imitations, I follow Crusius in holding that they are indeed pastiches, not centos.²⁷

Whether and to what degree such pastiches influenced the development of the cento is impossible to determine. Since the employment of allusions to and quotations from other authors' works has a long tradition in Greek and Latin literature, it does not seem likely that the pastiche in particular played a crucial role in the development of the cento, especially if one takes into account the great chronological distance from early pastiches such as those in Aristophanes to the appearance of the first attested centos.²⁸

1.1.2 The Beginnings

Only few Greek centos in the Ausonian sense – i.e. poems stitched together from lines and half-lines – survive; all of the extant examples use Homeric verses. Of particular interest for an investigation of the origin and development of the cento are the early Greek examples, which I analyse here in order to determine their relation to their Latin counterparts.

The first Greek cento that we have was inscribed on the Memnon

27 Crusius 1899; similarly Bouquiaux-Simon 1968, 12 n. 15 and p. 337 n. 89, who sees the main distinction between cento and pastiche in that the cento is a continuous compilation of quotations, whereas the pastiche primarily parodies a certain style of writing. Stemplinger 1912, 194 calls these passages centos. According to Salanitro 1981, pp. 21-22 the question of whether cento or pastiche is “un problema non ancora risolto (e forse insolubile, poiché non è sempre chiara e netta la distinzione fra queste due forme letterarie)”. Salanitro 1981, pp. 20-21 following Crusius 1899 (and in the case of the *Hymn* also Stemplinger 1912, p. 193), also discusses the Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite* and the *Batrachomyomachia* as works compiled *more centonario*, of which the latter may also be regarded a pastiche.

28 As the first extant cento I count Petronius 132,11. According to Quintilian, Ovid composed a poem completely from the verses of Macer, *Inst.* 6.3.96; see 1.2.

colossus in Egypt, a four-line praise of the statue.²⁹ The poem is subscribed: Ἀρείου Ὀμητικοῦ ποιητοῦ ἐκ Μουσείου ἀκούσαντος. Crusius dates this cento to the late Hellenistic period and suggests that the cento as described by Ausonius was popular among the Alexandrian poets of the Museum.³⁰ In their collection of inscriptions from the Memnon statue from 1960 André and Étienne Bernand dated the cento to the reign of Hadrian: “L’interêt porté par Hadrien au Musée et la mention, à l’époque d’Hadrien, en [inscription number] 20, d’un personnage qui faisait partie des ἐν Μουσεῖῳ σιτούμενοι, inviterait à dater l’inscription du règne de cet empereur”.³¹ If this suggestion is correct, then the inscription would still be the first known Greek cento, but it would be later than the first Latin cento (see below 1.2) .

Several short centos can be found in Lucian, who wrote in the second half of the second century AD. Besides the four-line poem in *Drapetai* 30, of which the third verse has been slightly changed and might therefore be regarded a pastiche rather than a cento,³² there is a five-line cento in paragraph 22 of the *Charon*,³³ and a five-line and six-line cento respectively in paragraphs 1 and 6 of the *Zeus Tragodos*. In paragraph 14 of the *Charon* there is one line put together from two Homeric half-lines. All these compilations have a comical context and are often accompanied by self-reflective remarks about re-using Homer. So in *Zeus Tragodos* 6 Zeus advises Hermes to employ Homeric lines in his proclamation after Hermes had called himself a bad poet; and Hermes responds to Charon’s cento describing the nature of death in *Charon* 22: ὥς πολὺν τὸν Ὀμηρον ἐπαντλεῖς. ἀλλ’ ἐπεῖπερ ἀνέμνησας, ἐθέλω σοι δεῖξαι τὸν τοῦ Ἀχιλλέως τάφον. Hence the poems resemble the early pastiches in Aristophanes.

29 CIG 4748 = 37 in Bernand 1960.

30 Crusius 1899; followed by e.g. Beck 2002 and Kunzmann and Hoch 1994.

31 Bernand 1960, p. 112. The inscription (CIG 4724) in question, number 20 in Bernand 1960, p. 66 reads: Σέρουιος Σουλπίκιος [Σερῆνος] / ἑπαρχὸς σπείρης, χει[λίαρχος] / λεγεῶνος κβ [ἑπαρχὸς ἄλλης Οὐο-] / κουντίω[ν] — / νεωκόρος τοῦ με [γάλου] Σαράπιδος, τῶν [ἐν Μουσεῖῳ] σιτουμένων ἀτελῶ[ν, ἤκουσα] / Μέμνονος ὥρασ— / (ἔτους) ζ’ Αἰδριανοῦ.

32 So Bouquiaux-Simon 1968, p. 337.

33 This poem is also regarded as a pastiche by Bouquiaux-Simon 1968, p. 434 due to its parodistic character.

In a different place Lucian gives us a hint about a performative context for Greek centos. In *Lapiths* 17, rhetorical performances are delivered to entertain the guests at a dinner party. The rhetorician Dionysodorus gives speeches, pleading both sides of a case. The grammarian Histiaeus is described as doing the following:

Histiaeus the grammarian, who had the place next to him [Dionysodorus], was reciting verse, combining the lines of Pindar and Hesiod and Anacreon in such a way as to make out of them a single poem and a very funny one, especially in the part where he said, as though foretelling what was going to happen: “They smote their shields together” [*Il.* 4,447] and “Then lamentations rose, and vaunts of men” [*Il.* 4,450].³⁴

ἐρραψώδει ... συνέφερεν ἐς τὸ αὐτὸ τὰ Πινδάρου καὶ Ἡσιόδου καὶ Ἀνακρέοντος, ὥς ἐξ πάντων μίαν ᾧδὴν παγγέλοιον ἀποτελεῖσθαι, μάλιστα δ' ἐκεῖνα ὥσπερ προμαντευόμενος τὰ μέλλοντα «σὺν δ' ἔβαλον ῥινοῦς» καὶ «ἐνθα δ' ἄρ' οἰμωγὴ τε καὶ εὐχολὴ πέλεν ἀνδρῶν».

Histiaeus is said to have combined lines from various poets into a single new poem. This is referred to as ‘rhapsodizing’, which here simply seems to mean “to recite verses”. Apparently the term *cento* or *κέντρων* was not yet established or at least not known to Lucian as a term for this kind of poetry. It is impossible to determine whether the verb “to rhapsodize” is used here ambiguously and thus includes the sense of “to stitch together”. The juxtaposition of Histiaeus making up a cento and Dionysodorus speaking both sides of a cause suggests that both activities were similarly common practices in performative declamation. Just as in the other centos in Lucian, Histiaeus’ performance is to a comical end: his poem is described as παγγέλοιον.

Another cento is quoted by Lucian’s contemporary Irenaeus of Lyons in his treatise *Against the Heresies*, written between 175-89.³⁵ Irenaeus describes the Gnostics’ misuse of the Scriptures:

“...They gather together sayings and names from scattered places and transfer them, as we have already said, from their natural meaning to an unnatural one. They act like those who would propose themes (ὑποθέσεις) which they chance upon and then try to put them to verse (μελετᾶν) from Homeric poems, so that the inexperienced think that Homer composed the poems with that theme, which in reality are of recent composition. Actually many are so misled by the contrived sequence of the verses that they question whether Homer may not have composed them thus; for example,

³⁴ Translation by Harmon 1913.

³⁵ For the date see e.g. Unger 1992, pp. 3-4 and Grant 1997, p. 6

if one would write as follows the Homeric lines about Hercules who was sent by Eurystheus to the dog in Hades. For the sake of illustration it is not forbidden to cite these verses, since in both cases the attempt is similar, even identical.”³⁶

Then comes a 10-line cento about Heracles,³⁷ and after that, Irenaeus goes on:

“What simple-minded person would not be misled by these verses and believe that Homer composed them in that manner for that very theme? One who is well-versed in Homeric themes will recognize the verses, but he will not recognize the theme, since he knows that some of them were spoken of Ulysses, others of Hercules himself, others of Priam, others of Menelaus and Agamemnon. However, if he takes them and puts each one back into its own [theme], he will make their fabricated theme disappear. In the same way, anyone who keeps unchangeable in himself in the Rule of the Truth received through baptism will recognize the names and sayings and parables from the Scriptures, but this blasphemous theme of theirs he will not recognize.”³⁸

Irenaeus compares the doings of the Gnostics to people who set themselves ‘themes’ according to which they re-arrange Homeric verses. The final product is a new poem that could be believed to have been composed by Homer himself. As Usher points out, both *ὑποθέσεις* and *μελετάω* are technical terms belonging to the disci-

36 “Ἐπειτα λέξεις καὶ ὀνόματα σποράδην κείμενα συλλέγοντες, μεταφέρουσι, καθὼς προειρήκαμεν, ἐκ τοῦ κατὰ φύσιν εἰς τὸ παρὰ φύσιν· ὅμοια ποιοῦντες τοῖς ὑποθέσεις τὰς τεχούσας αὐτοῖς προβαλλομένοις, ἔπειτα πειρωμένοις ἐκ τῶν Ὅμηρου ποιημάτων μελετᾶν αὐτάς, ὥστε τοὺς ἀπειροτέρους δοκεῖν, ἐπ’ ἐκείνης τῆς ἐξ ὑπογίου μεμελετημένης ὑποθέσεως Ὅμηρον τὰ ἔπη πεποιηκέναι, καὶ πολλοὺς συναρπάζεσθαι διὰ τῆς τῶν ἐπῶν συνθέτου ἀκολουθίας, μὴ ἄρα ταῦθ’ οὕτως Ὅμηρος εἶη πεποιηκός. Ὡς ὁ τὸν Ἡρακλέα ὑπὸ Εὐρυπύθῳ ἐπὶ τὸν ἐν τῷ ἄδῃ κύνα πεμπόμενον διὰ τῶν Ὀμηρικῶν στίχων γράφων οὕτως (οὐδὲν γὰρ κάλυψε παραδείγματος χάριν ἐπιμνησθῆναι καὶ τούτων, ὁμοίας καὶ τῆς αὐτῆς οὔσης ἐπιχειρήσεως τοῖς ἀμφοτέροις). 1,9,4.

37 The authorship of the cento is debated. Unger 1992, p. 181 ascribes it to Irenaeus himself and provides an overview on the literature on this question.

38 Τίς οὐκ ἂν ἀπανούργων συναρπαγείῃ ὑπο τῶν ἐπῶν τούτων, καὶ νομίσειεν οὕτως αὐτὰ Ὅμηρον ἐπὶ ταύτης τῆς ὑποθέσεως πεποιηκέναι; Ὁ δ’ ἔμπειρος τῆς Ὀμερικῆς ἐπιγνώσεται, εἰδὼς ὅτι τὸ μὲν τι αὐτῶν ἐστὶ περὶ Ὀδυσσεύος εἰρημένον, τὸ δὲ περὶ Μενελάου καὶ Ἀγαμέμνονος. Ἄρα δὲ αὐτὰ, καὶ ἐν ἑκάστῳ ἀποδοὺς τῇ ἰδίᾳ, ἐκποδὼν ποιήσει τὴν ὑπόθεσιν. οὕτω δὲ καὶ ὁ τὸν κανόνα τῆς ἀληθείας ἀκλινῇ ἐν ἑαυτῷ κατέξων, ἂν διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος εἴληφε, τὰ μὲν ἐκ τῶν Γραφῶν ὀνόματα, καὶ τὰς λέξεις καὶ τὰς παραβολὰς ἐπιγνώσεται, τὴν δὲ βλάσφημον ὑπόθεσιν ταύτην οὐκ ἐπιγνώσεται, Ir. 1,9,4.; transl. Unger 1992.

plaine of *declamatio*: μελετάω means “to declaim”, a ὑποθέσις is the specific theme declaimed.³⁹ Just as in paragraph 17 of the *Lapiths*, this passage from Irenaeus suggests that it was common to make up new poems extemporaneously out of other poets’ lines on certain topics or themes in the context of declamation. *Against the Heresies* was addressed to a friend of Irenaeus, probably a bishop situated in Italy, who supposedly intended to use the treatise to explain the dangers of Valentinianism to his flock.⁴⁰ The fact that Irenaeus uses the practice of extemporaneous combination of Homeric lines into a new poem as a point of reference, presupposes a certain degree of familiarity with this practice among his audience. The need for a detailed explanation of the process arises from his aim to unveil the Gnostics’ abuse of the Scriptures. For the same reason Irenaeus claims that someone familiar with the original Homeric text would be incapable of understanding the meaning of the newly compiled poem.⁴¹ This is hardly believable; but Irenaeus needs to make the point that a believer in the ‘right’ Christian truth cannot be misled by the Gnostic interpretations of the Scriptures.

Similarly to Lucian, Irenaeus does not use the term κέντρων. However, Tertullian in his work of 203, the *Prescription against the Heretics*, when making the same comparison between the Heretics’ misuse of the Scriptures and the stitching together of poetry, does use the term *Homerocentones* to refer to new poems made out of Homer.⁴² Perhaps Irenaeus avoids the technical term since he does not want the cento technique to appear as something too elaborate, which might overshadow his argument about the Gnostics. Another explanation could be that the term was in fact unknown to him and was established and accepted earlier in Latin than in Greek.

Finally, like Irenaeus, the author of the pseudo-Plutarchian trea-

39 See Usher 1998, p. 29 following Russell 1983 (with an index of technical terms on pp. 136-141) and Heath 1995. Unger 1992, p. 167 understands μελετάω less specifically as “to practice”.

40 Unger 1992, pp. 4-6.

41 The poetological concept of the cento and the underlying meaning and context of the original text will be discussed below (2.2).

42 *Homerocentones etiam vocare solent qui de carminibus Homeri propria opera more centonario ex multis hinc inde compositis in unum sarciant corpus*, 39,5.