THE HOMERIC CENTO IN IRENAEUS (ADV. HAER. 1, 9, 4)

The article studies the Homeric cento quoted by Irenaeus in *Adversus Haereses* (1, 9, 4) in the section directed against Valentinus and his followers: Irenaeus illustrates that their piecing together of disjoint passages from the Scriptures is similar to the technique used by authors of centones. The cento in question is of great interest as one of the earliest surviving examples of the genre that became popular in IV–V centuries AD. The article proposes a detailed linear commentary of the cento, with special attention to the interplay between the original context of the line and the way it is used in the cento. It is shown that the poetic technique, the sophisticated use of Homeric lines, and the subtle irony show that author of the cento was a cultivated, witty, and most probably pagan author who composed the cento for the mere enjoyment of the form.

*Key words:* cento, Irenaeus, Homer, Heracles, Cerberus, Eurystheus.

THE HOMEROVSKYJ CENTON U IRENEJ (Adv. Haer. 1, 9, 4)

Статья посвящена гомеровскому центону, который Иреней Люонский приводит в своем сочинении *Adversus Haereses* (1, 9, 4) в рамках полемики с Валентином и его последователями: Иреней показывает, что их практика компилирования разрозненных пассажей из Священного Писания в подтверждение своего учения, без должного внимания к их исходным контекстам, сродни технике составления центонов. Приведенный Иренеем центон, посвященный похищению Цербера Гераклом, представляет большой интерес как один из ранних дошедших до нас образцов жанра, который станет популярным позже, в IV–V вв. н. э. В статье предлагается подробный построчный комментарий центона, с особым вниманием к тому, как его автор играет с исходным контекстом использованных гомеровских стихов. Изысканное сочетание гомеровских стихов, замечательная поэтическая техника, равно как и тонкая ирония показывают, что сочинитель центона был высокообразованным, остроумным и, скорее всего, языческим автором, составившим его исключительно ради удовольствия, которую доставляла ему данная литературная форма.

*Ключевые слова:* центон, Иреней, Гомер, Геракл, Цербер, Еврисфей.
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In the section of his book Against Heresies against Valentinus and his followers, criticizing their practice of bringing together disjoint passages from the Scriptures and thus, in his view, subverting the teaching, Irenaeus of Lyon quotes a Homeric cento to illustrate how the pastiche technique disrespects the original context, creating a story that Homer had never told, just as the Valentinians create a new teaching by piecing together excerpts from the Bible. This short cento is of great interest as one of the earliest examples of the genre that had not yet reached the popularity it would later enjoy. This article proposes not only to analyze the way the cento is assessed and used by Irenaeus in his argumentation, but also to study it as an independent poem with an intricate web of intertextual play with the Homeric epics. It will be shown that the poem quoted by Irenaeus is a work of an erudite, witty and extremely skilled author.

Protesting against the practice of Valentinus and his followers of assembling quotations from the Scriptures with disregard to their context (ἐπείτα λέξεις καὶ όνόματα σποράδην κείμενα σωλλέγοντες, μεταφέροντι, καθὼς προερήκαμεν, ἐκ τοῦ κατὰ φύσις εἰς τὸ παρὰ φύσιν, “and then, gathering together expressions and words that are disseminated, they transpose them, as we have said before, from a natural context to an unnatural one”), Irenaeus goes on to compare this practice to the composition of centos from Homeric lines:

Ως ὁ τῶν Ἡρακλεᾶ ύπο Εὐρυσθέως ἐπὶ τὸν ἐν τῷ Ἀδη κόνα πεμπόμενον διὰ τῶν Ὀμηρικῶν στίχων γράφων οὕτως· (οὐδὲν γὰρ

1 Against Heresies is believed to have been written between 180 and 189 (Fedchenkov 2009: 359). A complete Latin translation of the work dating to ca. 380 survives, as well as excerpts in Armenian and in the original Greek (Osborn 2001: 1; Fedchenkov 2008: 339). The passage containing the cento is preserved in the Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis whose discussion of the Valentinian sect depends almost entirely on Irenaeus (Williams 2009: xxv). It is lucky that the passage in Greek is preserved: although we would have probably been able to identify the Homeric lines used in the cento from its Latin translation (see Harvey 1857: 86–87), it might have been difficult to recognize the modifications introduced by the author of the cento into Homer’s text in lines 8 and 9.

2 It is generally accepted that the high point in the development and popularity of the cento as a literary genre was IV–V century AD (see e.g. recently Garambois-Vasquez 2017: 9). On the genre in general, see the classical overview by O. Crusius 1899; Bright 1984: 80–82; for the problematization and assessment of intertextuality in the cento, see the excellent article by Hinds 2014, as well as Bažil 2017.
κωλύει παραδείγματος χάριν ἐπιμνησθῆναι καὶ τούτων, ὄμοιας καὶ τῆς αὐτῆς οὐσίας ἐπιχειρήσεως τοῖς ἀμφοτέροις.) Ὄς εἰπὼν, ἀπέπεμψε δόμων βαρέα στενάχοντα. Φῶθ᾽ Ἦρακλῆς, μεγάλων ἐπιύστορα ἐργον, Εὐρύσθεως, Σθενέλου παῖς Περσηφάδαο Ἔξ Ἐρέβεως ἀξοντα κώνα στοιχερῷ Ἀίδαο. Βὴ δ᾽ ἰμὲν, ὡστε λέον ὀρεστήροφος ἀλκὶ πεποιθῶς. Καρπαλίως ἀνὰ ἀστυν θύλοι δ᾽ ἀνὰ πάντες ἐκπόντο, Νῦμφαι τ᾽ ἥθεοί τε, πολύτητοι τε γέροντες, Οὐκτρ᾽ ὀλοφυρόμενοι, ὅσι θάνατόνδε κιόντα. Ἐρμείας δ᾽ ἀπέπεμπεν, ἵδε γλαυκόπις Ἀθηνή. Ἡθεὶς γὰρ κατὰ θυμὸν ἀδελφεὸν ὡς ἐπονεῖτο,

"Just as the one who writes in the following way about Heracles being sent by Eurystheus for the hound of Hades by using Homeric verses (it is not amiss to recall them exempli gratia, as the procedure is the same for both):

Having said this, he sent him away from his home, moaning deeply, The man Heracles, experienced in many deeds, Eurystheus, the son of Sthenelus son of Perseus, To bring from Erebus the hound of the hateful Hades. And he went on his way, as a mountain-bred lion, haughty in his might, Rapidly through the city: and all his friends followed, Maidens and youths, and elderly men who had suffered much, Weeping pitifully, as if he were going to his death. And Hermes led him on his way, and the owl-eyed Athena: For she knew in <her> heart, how besieged by cares her brother was” (Iren. Adv. Haer. 1, 1, 20 = Epiph. Panar. 1, 29, 5–8).

It is worth noting how Irenaeus accompanies the quotation by an excuse for introducing it, οὐδὲν γὰρ κωλύει παραδείγματος χάριν ἐπιμνησθῆναι καὶ τούτων: this parenthesis seems to reflect his need to justify the fact that he does quote a poem that as a sensitive and well-read reader he does appreciate, although it belongs to a genre that he, on the whole, disapproves of 3. He goes on to explain the impression that this cento might create in an inadvertent reader 4.

Τὰς οὐκ ἣν τῶν ἀπανθοῦργων συναρπασεῖ ὑπὸ τῶν ἐπόν τούτων, καὶ νομίσαεν οὔτως αὐτὰ Ὁμηρον ἐπὶ ταύτης τῆς ὑποθέσεως

3 The comparison of the cento technique to the indiscriminate use of the Scriptures will later be echoed by Jerome in his letter to Paulinus of Nola: ad sensum suum incongrua aptant testimonia, quasi grande sit et non vitiosissimum docendi genus, depravare sententias, et ad voluntatem suam Scripturam habere re pugnament (Hieron. Ep. 53,7; cf. Tertul. Praescr. 39, 3; 4; 6).

4 The importance of this point is rightly emphasized by Sowers (2020: 101).
πεποιηκέναι; Ο δ’ ἐμπειρὸς τῆς Ὀμηρικῆς ὑπόθεσεως ἐπιγνώσται, [suppl. μὲν τὰ ἔτη, τὴν δ’ ὑπόθεσιν οὐκ ἐπιγνώσται,] εἰδὼς ὅτι τὸ μὲν τι αὐτῶν ἐστὶ περὶ Ὅδυσσέως εἰρημένων, τὸ δὲ περὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ Ἡρακλέους, τὸ δὲ περὶ Πριάμου, τὸ δὲ περὶ Μενελάου καὶ Ἀγαμέμνονος. Ἀρας δὲ αὐτὰ, καὶ ἐν ἔκαστον ἀποδοὺς τῇ ἰδιᾳ, ἐκποιῆσαι τὴν ὑπόθεσιν, “Who among the guileless would not be captured by these verses, and would not consider that Homer had composed them on this storyline? But he who is experienced in Homer’s composition would recognize <the verses as Homer’s, and would not recognize the story plot as Homer’s>, knowing that one of them was said of Odysseus, and one of Heracles himself, and one on Priamus, and one on Menelas and Agamemnon. And taking them, and one by one placing them back where they belong, he would make the story plot disappear” (Adv. haer. 1, 9, 4).

This remark refers to the game that the author of the cento plays with the reader, challenging him to recognize the original contexts of the Homeric verses that had been used to weave together this text that is cardinally new, and on a topic that Homer had never treated (cf. Keaney, Lamberton 1996: 310–311; Usher 1998: 29). However, Irenaeus emphasizes and explicitly disapproves of the deceptive nature of this game, suggesting that it is worthy of πανούργοι.

The authorship of the cento has been discussed. Among the earliest authors to bring up the question of the cento’s authorship was Heinrich Ziegler, who suggested that Irenaeus might have composed it himself (or might be citing another author): in both cases Ziegler argued that the quotation of the cento demonstrates Irenaeus’ familiarity with classical Greek literature.

5 It is not easy to give an adequate translation of the word ὑπόθεσις here, as the works where this passage is analyzed show: Wilken translates it as “sense” or “system”, making it refer to “the meaning of the Christian faith” (Wilken 1967: 33); Usher contests this interpretation, stressing that ὑπόθεσις applies more to the composition / performance of centones (Usher 1998: 29 n. 15); Sowers also interprets ὑπόθεσις as a term taken from the Classical paideia, in particular, from the tradition of rhetorical declamation (Sowers 2020: 96). We would suggest that the term is used in the sense “subject”, or even more exactly “storyline” or “plot of the story”, a meaning that was developed in particular with regard to summaries of plays (LSJ 1996: 1882, s.v. ὑπόθεσις II.3; cf. Holwerda 1976).

In his 1961 book on Classical Greek culture in the first centuries of Christianity, Jean Daniélou briefly discussed the cento on Heracles quoted by Irenaeus: judging from the broader context of Irenaeus’ passage (discussion of Gnosticism), and from the popularity of centones among the Gnostics, Daniélou surmised that the cento must have been composed by Valentinus and must thus be interpreted not as a poem on a pagan myth, but as an allegorical rendering of the Christian doctrine. Daniélu’s hypothesis of Valentinus’ authorship was rejected by Robert L. Wilken who argued that Irenaeus does not designate Valentinus as author anywhere, nor does he seem to view the poem as a Christian (or Gnostic) allegory: his only point in using the cento is to illustrate the subversion of the original text through the pastiche technique. In recent studies, the question of authorship of the cento is usually qualified as unanswerable, and only the high culture of its author is emphasized: thus, Brian Sowers viewed the cento quoted by Irenaeus as a product of classical paideia that should be interpreted independently of Irenaeus’ polemics; similarly, Oscar Prieto Domínguez argues that the cento did not originally carry any religious associations, and that its allegorical interpretation is secondary.

7 “This is a cento of lines from Homer, composed by Valentinus and given an allegorical meaning by him” (Daniélou 1973 [1961]: 85). This allegorical meaning is interpreted as follows: “It seems therefore that what Valentinus was seeking to describe was the mission of Christ, sent by the Father into the realm of death to deliver those who were death’s prisoners, a mission of immense labour in which Christ figures as hero” (ibid. 86). On centones in Gnostics, see also Prieto Domínguez 2011: 102.

8 “Consequently we conclude that the cento does not reproduce a gnostic allegory of Homer, and that there is no link between he content of the cento and the content of gnostic teaching […] Irenaeus used the cento simply as an illustration of how men misunderstand and pervert writings when they rewrite them to suit their purposes. Perhaps such an interpretation is more prosaic than that offered by Daniélou, but it is certainly not less interesting. For it shows us something of Irenaeus’ familiarity with classical authors, his awareness of how they were used in his own day, and his skill at putting such knowledge to work in a theological argument” (Wilken 1967: 31).

9 “In my view, Irenaeus’ Herculaean cento, written during the earliest stages of early Christianity’s engagement with Graeco-Roman poetry, should be read and interpreted on its own before being placed within the context of Irenaeus’ polemical agenda” (Sowers 2020: 99).

10 “este poema en origen debió de ser un centón no-religioso cristianizado por los primeros creyentes y dogmatizado por algunas partes de la Iglesia primitiva: el mito de Heracles pasa a representar el misterio de Cristo” (Prieto Domínguez 2011: 102).
This cautiousness in speaking of the cento’s author seems appropriate. We propose a detailed linear commentary of the cento, with special attention to the interplay between the original context of the line and the way it is used in the cento. We will then summarize what can be gleaned about its author from its poetic technique, and briefly return to Irenaeus’ use and evaluation of the cento.

1. ὤς εἰπὼν ἀπέπεμπε δόμων βαρέα στενάχοντα. The verse is taken from the scene in *Odyssey* 10, when Aeolus harshly sends Odysseus away from his palace, refusing him further help:

   ἔρρ’ ἐκ νῆσου θάσσον, ἔλέγχεσε ξύωντων·
   οὐ γάρ μοι θέμις ἐστὶ κομιζέμεν οὐδ’ ἀποπέμπειν
   ἄνδρα τὸν, δς τε θεοῦ σιν ἀπέχθηται μακάρεσιν
   ἔρρ’, ἐπεὶ ἁθανάτοισιν ἀπεχθόμενος τὸδ’ ἰκάνεις, “Get gone from the island, the sooner the better, you most accursed of mortals: for it is not right for me either to entertain as a guest or to send off the man who is hateful to the blessed gods: get gone, because you come here, hated by gods” (*Od*. 10, 72–75).

   The line used for the cento follows this speech, briefly describing Odysseus’ return to his comrades before they resume their journey. Not much is remarkable about *Od*. 10, 76, and other ancient authors do not seem to have used it\(^\text{11}\). While the author of the cento seems to have chosen his subject based on the possibility of combining lines mentioning Heracles, Eurystheus and Cerberus (vv. 2–4), the first verse of the cento was taken as the starting point primarily because of the verb ἀπέπεμπε\(^\text{12}\). It should be noted that in this new context the formulaic ending βαρέα στενάχοντα\(^\text{13}\) seems to acquire a delicate irony, highlighting an unexpected emotionality in Heracles, as he is depicted lamenting the task that will become the greatest of his labors (see note on v. 2); one can also imagine that, as Odysseus had pleaded with Aeolus, Heracles might have pleaded

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\(^{11}\) See West’s *apparatus criticus* (West 2017: 204, *ad Od*. 10, 76). The passage itself was, of course, well-known: e.g. verses 74–75 are cited by emperor Julian in one of his letters (*Iul. Epist*. 49, 432a).

\(^{12}\) There is a subtle play on the two meanings of ἀποπέμπειν in Homer: in Aeolus’ speech it is used of official send-off (*πομπή*), whereas in the capping formulaic verse it appears in the sense “to chase someone away from the house” (cf. Heubeck, Hoekstra 1989: 47, *ad Od*. 10, 76).

\(^{13}\) Besides the current passage, βαρέα στενάχοντα appears (invariably at the end of the verse) in *Il*. 8, 334; 13, 423; 13, 538; 14, 432; *Od*. 4, 516; 5, 420; 23, 317.
with Eurystheus to spare him\textsuperscript{14}. The introductory ὡς εἰπὼν leaves the impression of an extract from a larger narrative (rather than an account commencing in medias res), and the reader is left guessing what Eurystheus’ words might have been.

\textbf{2. φῶθ᾽ Ἡρακλῆα, μεγάλων ἐπίστορα ἔργων.} The first of the three lines that directly mention the main characters of the myth (Heracles, Eurystheus, Cerberus) is taken from \textit{Od.} 21, 26, where Homer recounts the story of the encounter of young Odysseus with Iphytus, and the bow and arrows that Iphytus had given him as a gift (\textit{Od.} 21, 12–41); later in the book the same bow will be used by Odysseus to slay the suitors. Heracles’ role in this story is ambivalent, as he killed Iphytus, who was staying as a guest at his house, in total violation of the laws of \textit{xenia} (see especially \textit{Od.} 21, 27–29). It should be noted that the passage as a whole has been suspected of being an interpolation because of the confusing details of the myth and the unstraightforward, convoluted structure of the narrative\textsuperscript{15}. However, it was included in Alexandrian editions of Homer, and the author of the cento obviously did not consider it spurious. Due to the mention of Heracles’ name and to the \textit{hapax legomenon ἐπίστορ}, the line was used by several authors: thus, Strabo in the beginning of his \textit{Geography} recalls the expression μεγάλων ἐπίστορα ἔργων (Strab. 1, 1, 16) as highly suitable for Heracles because of his experience; Clement of Alexandria cites the verse in his catalogue of authors who considered Heracles a mortal (Clem. \textit{Protr.} 2, 30, 7; in this case, it was certainly the expression φῶθ᾽ Ἡρακλῆα that drew his attention). There is evidence that for ancient scholars the interpretation of μεγάλων ἐπίστορα ἔργων presented a problem: it could be taken to refer to Heracles’ experience in undertaking difficult labors, or to his indirect implication in the abduction of the mares of Eurytus\textsuperscript{16}. However, the author of the cento seems to have

\textsuperscript{14} Cf. scholia (\textit{ad Od.} 10, 76) that comment on βαρέα στενόχωντα that it is appropriate of someone whose plea was ignored (ὅπερ οἰκεῖον εἰπεῖν ἐπὶ τοῦ ἐν ἴκεσιν μὴ ἔλεηθέντος).

\textsuperscript{15} Russo, Fernández-Galiano, Heubeck 1992: 150 (\textit{ad Od.} 21, 13) and 151 (\textit{ad Od.} 21, 26), with references to earlier studies.

\textsuperscript{16} Most lexicographers seem to have understood ἐπίστορ as reference to Heracles’ experience: Hesychius cites the word in the same case in which it stood in Homer (ἐπίστορα. ἔμπειρον “experienced”, Hsch. ἔ 4826; similarly, \textit{schol. in Od.} 21, 26); the other interpretation, “accomplice”, is mentioned in Eustathius (\textit{in Od.} 21, 25 = vol. 2, 247 Dindorf), and is alluded to in poetry (see especially Quint. 13, 373; cf. Lehrs 1882: 109).
understood it as a simple reference to his labors. As regards the combination of this verse with the previous line (Od. 10, 76), there is a subtle subversion of the character of Heracles that is brought out by the intertext: a well-versed reader would have noticed that in *Odyssey* 21 Heracles is specifically characterized by his courage: ἐπεὶ δὴ Διὸς ὑιὸν ἀφίκετο καρτερόθυμον, ἐφ’ Ἑρακλῆα, μεγάλων ἐπίστορα ἔργοιν… “but when he reached Zeus’ son of mighty spirit, the man Heracles, experienced in great labors…” (Od. 21, 25–26). The reader who remembered that Heracles had been presented as καρτερόθυμος in the *Odyssey* would have enjoyed the ironic contrast with his emotional reaction to the task assigned to him by Eurystheus in the cento (βαρέα στενάχοντα).

3. Εὐρυσθεύς, Σθενέλοιο πάϊς Περσηΐδαο. The line comes from Here’s speech quoted within Agamemnon’s speech to Achilles: Agamemnon, saying that he is willing to make amends, recounts, as an example of the powers of Ate who had beguiled him, the story of Here using her to trick Zeus and to make Eurystheus king instead of Heracles. In Here’s short and malicious announcement of the birth of Eurystheus to Zeus the name of the newborn is postponed17, in order to taunt Zeus’ expectations that Heracles will be born first, and adroitly combined with the apposition σὸν γένος “your progeniture”18. Eurystheus’ name and lineage (which in this case is equally important) markedly occupy a whole verse:

Zeῦ πάτερ ἄργικέρανυ, ἔπος τι τοι ἐν φρεσὶ θῆσων· ἣδη άνήρ γέγον’ ἐσθόλος δ’ Ἀργείουσιν ἀνάξει
Εὐρυσθεύς Σθενέλοιο πάϊς Περσηΐδαο

17 Cf. Edwards 1991: 251, *ad Il*. 19, 121–124: “Here’s revelation is crafted with immense skill; first comes the birth of a future king, then the surprise of his name (in the prominent position […] and his lineage, and finally the triumphant σὸν γένος, which again begins the verse”.

18 Here’s malice in her use of the apposition σὸν γένος lies in its ambiguity: Zeus is expecting his own son, Heracles, to be born first and become king, whereas Here is evoking the fact that Sthenelos was the son of Perseus, and thus grandson of Zeus. Cf. Eustathius’ succinct explanation of what Here’s words to Zeus meant: οία δηλαδή κατηγμένω έκ σοῦ διὰ τὴν σήν ποτὲ Δανάην, ἐξ ἴς ὁ πατήρ τούτου Περσεύς “obviously as he is your descendent from Danae, who was yours at the time and from whom [Sthenelus’] father was born” (Eustath. *in Il*. 19, 96–133 = 4, 293 van der Valk).
σὸν γένος· οὖν οἱ ἀεικές ἀνασσέμεν Ἀργείοισιν, “Father Zeus, lord of bright thunder, I will announce some news (lit. put a word in your mind): he is born already, the beautiful man who will rule over the Argives, Eurystheus, son of Sthenelus son of Perseus, your progeniture: it is not unfit for him to rule over the Argives” (II. 19, 121–124).

The line seems to have been evoked fairly regularly in scholarly contexts, dealing with mythography: thus, the line is quoted by scholia to Thucydides’ ἀρχαιολογία (schol. in Thuc. 1, 9, 2), and M. L. West, following K. Latte, suggested that Hesychius’ entry on Eurystheus was based on this verse\(^\text{19}\); among literary texts, the verse does not seem to have been cited much, although there may be an allusion to it in Pindar fr. 169a 44–45. Given the subject of the cento, this was the one Homeric verse the author of the poem could not really forgo.

4. εξ Ἐρέμους ἀξόντα κόνα στυγεροῦ Ἀἰδα. The line is taken from Athena’s speech in Iliad 8, as she complains of Zeus turning away from the Greeks in compliance with Thetis’ plea. Athena recalls how, at Zeus’ request, she had helped Heracles with his tasks, and in her indignation states that, had she foreseen their disagreement with Zeus over the Greeks, she would never have helped:

εἰ γὰρ ἐγὼ τάδε ἣδε’ ἐνί φρεσὶ πενεκαλιμησιν εὐτέ μην εἰς Ἀἴδαο πυλάρταο προὑπεμυγν
ἐξ Ἐρέμους ἀξόντα κόνα στυγεροῦ Ἀἴδαο,
οὐκ ἄν ὑπεξέσφυγε Στυγὸς ὡδὺτος αἰπά ρέθρα, “Had I but known that in my mighty mind, when [Eurystheus] had sent him to Hades’ gatekeeper, to bring back for Erebus the dog of the hateful Hades, he would not have fled the steep currents of Styx’ waters” (II. 8, 366–369).

This passage of Athena’s speech was well known: apart from a large number of quotations in the grammatical and lexicographical traditions, the verses are evoked by Pausanias and Aelius

\(^{19}\) See West’s apparatus criticus (West 2000–2006: 2, 204 ad II. 19, 123); cf. K. Latte’s presentation of Hesychius’ entry Εὐρυσθεος· Σθενέλου καὶ Νικίππης οὐς (T 123), “Eurystheus, son of Sthenelos and Nikippe” (Hsch. e 7155). Actually, Hesychius seems to have combined II. 19, 123 with Νικίππης δ’ ἄρ’ ἐγίημε. βῆ Σθενέλοι[ο ὄν]ἀκτο[ς “his Highness, the ruler Sthenelos, married Nikippe” (Hes. fr. 190 Merkelbach–West), where Nikippe’s name is reconstructed, but with a fair amount of certainty.
Aristides. The ingenuity of the author of the cento is evident in his use of this line. On the one hand, it contains a straightforward description of Heracles’ labor (incidentally, it is the only one that Athena mentions specifically in her speech, although she states that she had helped out with other labors as well), and its use was warranted by the subject of the cento. On the other hand, for a reader who remembered the original context of the line, the fact that it was spoken by Athena would anticipate the mention of the goddess in line 9 (= Od. 11, 626).

5. βῆ δ’ ἵμεν ὃς τε λέων ὀρεσίτροφος, ἀλκὶ πεποιθῶς. This line is among stock Homeric quotations; it is taken from the opening of one of the most well-known Homeric similes, comparing naked, covered in filth, hungry Odysseus to a mountain lion:

βῆ δ’ ἵμεν ὃς τε λέων ὀρεσίτροφος, ἀλκὶ πεποιθῶς,
ὁ γὰρ ἀσπονδόλακος ἐξεστήσατο πόιμνῳ δέος
ὅτι κατέλατε καὶ ἐν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἔστησεν
ὁ γὰρ ἄνθρωπος ἐπὶ ἐξετάζειν τινός ἄλλον ἀνθρώπον
μάλιστα μεταποίησαν ἐν ἔχοντος τὴν ἀνδριάν
καὶ ἀνέπτυξαν καὶ ἐν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἔστησεν...

“He advanced as a mountain lion, confident in his might, who walks in rain and wind, and his eyes are ablaze: and he comes unto oxen or sheep, or on wild deer; for his hunger (lit. stomach) drives him to attack cattle, and even to enter a well-defended homestead…” (Od. 6, 130–134)

Probably it was the opening, βῆ δ’ ἵμεν, that first directed the attention of the cento’s author to it (at this point in the poem, the beginning of Heracles’ journey had to be highlighted), but ultimately the insertion of an extended simile, typical trait of Homer’s style, seems to have been of equal importance. While there is a large number of lion similes in the Homeric poems, and there is even another simile that starts with the same βῆ δ’ ἵμεν ὃς τε λέων ὀρεσίτροφος in the Iliad (12, 299), the author seems to have chosen Od. 6, 130 for several reasons: (a) the line is syntactically

20 For a full list of references, see M. L. West’s apparatus criticus (ad loc.). The passage (Il. 8, 366–369) is quoted directly by Pausanias (8, 18, 3) and Ælius Aristides (Or. 3, 377).
21 οὐδὲ τὸν μέμνηται, ὃι μᾶλα πολλὰκις ὠν / τειρόμενον σώσκον ὑπ’ Εὐρυσθῆσις ἄνθρωπον, “nor does he remember, how I saved many times for his son under duress of Eurystheus’ tasks” (Il. 8, 362–363).
22 On the relationship of Il. 12, 299 and Od. 6, 130–134, see Hainsworth 1993: 351, ad Il. 12, 299–306; more generally on lion similes as a traditional element of the poetic diction, see Fränkel 1921: 69–70; Scott 1974: 58–62; Friedrich 1981: 120–125.
autonomous, constituting a full phrase, which made it easier to combine it with the next verse; (b) there seems to be a subtle irony in applying Odysseus’ comparison to a hungry lion on the prowl (which concerned his general appearance, not to predatory intentions²³) to Heracles whose actual task is to abduct the dog Cerberus. There is thus a tongue-in-cheek change of applicability of the epic simile (as concerns the tertium comparationis), and a reader who remembered the Homeric simile might have even associated ἐς πυκνὸν δόμον ἐλθεῖν at the end of the passage with the Hades²⁴.

6–8. καρπαλίμως ἄνα ἀστυ· φίλοι δ’ ἄνα πάντες ἔποντο… οἴκτρ’ ὀλυφφόρῳνοι, ὠσεὶ θανάτονδε κιόντα. Verses 6 and 8 of the cento both come from a single passage in the Iliad 24, describing Priam’s progress on his chariot through Troy on his way to the Greek camp, where he goes to plead with Achilles to give him back Hector’s corpse²⁵. In view of the mortal danger he is putting himself in, his friends and close ones follow Priam on his way, and leave him at the gates of Troy (vv. 329–331). The text of v. 6 as given in the quotation from Irenaeus in the Panarion diverges from the Homeric vulgate: (a) instead of the Homeric κατὰ ἁμα it reads ἄνα ἀστυ, and (b) instead of Homeric ἄμα the text reads ἄνά (producing a tmesis ἄνά… ἔποντες). However, a comparison with the Latin translation (where the line is rendered as urbem per medium: noti simul omnes abibant, see Harvey 1857: 87) shows that, at least in the case of the second divergence, the error must have crept into the

²³ Cf. de Jong 2001: 158, who argues that appearance is only the secondary function of the simile, while the primary tertium comparationis is that both Odysseus and the lion are in need (Odysseus of clothing and guidance, the lion of prey): “The secondary function of this simile is to give expression to the way in which the girls focalize Odysseus: in their eyes, Odysseus is as frightening as a lion, not only because he is a man and might harm them […] but especially because, like that animal, he is disfigured through exposure to the elements (the lion is ‘rained on and blown by the wind’, Odysseus is ‘befouled with brine’)”. On the double point of this comparison, see also Heubeck, West, Hainsworth 1988: 302, ad Od. 6, 130–7.

²⁴ Cf. the formular expression “house of Hades” (Ἀδαίσο δόμοι, usually in dative or in the accusative) in II. 15, 251; 22, 52; 22, 482; 23, 19; 23, 103; 23, 179; Od. 10, 175, 491 and 564; 12, 21; 14, 208; 15, 350; 20, 208; 24, 204; 24, 264.

²⁵ The passage leads up to one of the best-known scenes from the Homeric epics (Priam’s night visit to Achilles to claim Hector’s body). While not often quoted per se, there is little doubt that these lines (and preceding verses) were regularly included in discussions of the scene.
text of the cento after Irenaeus (*simul* undoubtedly renders ἀμα, not ἀνά). It is worthwhile to quote the passage in full, not only to quote the Homeric original reading, but also because it allows us to show how the author of the cento had to adapt syntactically the verses for his poem:

πρόσθε μὲν ἡμίονοι ἔλκον τετράκυκλον ἄπτήνην, 
tὰς Ἰδαίος ἐλαυνε δαῖφρων· αὐτάρ ὄπισθεν ἤποι, τοὺς ὁ γέρων ἑφέπων μάστιγι κέλευ 
kαρπαλίμοις κατὰ ἄστω· φίλοι δ’ ἁμα πάντες ἐποντο 
pόλλα’ ὕλοφυρόμενοι ὡς εἰ θάνατον δὲ κιόντα, “in front of him mules drew the four-wheeled wagon that the skillful Idaeus drove forward; and behind them the horses, that the elderly man [Priam] whipped on swiftly through the city: and all his friends (or loved ones) followed together with him, much lamenting him, as if he were heading to his death” (*Il*. 24, 324–328).

The author of the cento took only the last part of the description of Priam’s progress which did not form a full sentence from the point of syntax, joining it adroitly with *Od*. 6, 130: by the same dint he began a new phrase in the middle of the verse, and, had he followed Homer without modification, the sentence would have ended on the very next verse: however, the use of two consecutive Homeric lines in a row would have been contrary to the “rules of the game”, as the very idea of cento presupposed combining disjoint lines. To eschew this, the author of the cento expanded the subject of the sentence (φίλοι) by introducing (as verse 7) an equally famous line νύμφαι τ’ ἡθεοί τε, πολύτλητοί τε γέροντες from the

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26 This is mentioned as a rule by Prieto Domínguez 2011: 108; Sowers 2020: 100. Indeed, ancient writers of centones also state that they did their best to avoid using two consecutive lines in a row: Ausonius in the preface to *Cento nuptialis* says nam duos iunctim locare ineptum est, et tres una serie merae nugae, “for it is inappropriate to place together two joint lines, and to place three in a row is a mere joke”; and Eudocia in the preface to her own *Homerocentones* felt it necessary to apologize for using “double lines”: εἰ δὲ τις αἰτίωστο καὶ ἡμέας ἐς ψόγον ἔλκοι, / δοιάδες οὖνεκα πολλαῖ ἀρίχλον κατὰ βιβλον / εἰσὶν Ὁμήρειῶν τ’ ἐπέων θ’ ὁπερ ὦ θέμις εστίν, / ἵστῳ τούθ’, δὴ πάντες ὑποδηστήρες ἀνάγης, “and should someone accuse and condemn us, because there are multiple double lines from Homeric epic poems in this conspicuous book, which is not allowed, let him know that all they were abettors of necessity” (Eudoc. praef. 15–18 Usher). Incidentally, she did indeed use the two successive lines *Il*. 24, 327–328 in her cento (vv. 1734–1735).
catalogue of souls from Odysseus’ account of his descent to Hades in the *Odyssey*:

[...] αἱ δ’ ἀγέροντο

ψυχαί ὑπὲξ Ὑρέβεως νεκρῶν καταστηθήσων

νῦμφαι τ’ ἥθεοι τε πολύληπτοι τε γέροντες

παρθενικια τ’ ἀταλαί νεοπενθέα θυμὸν ἔχουσαι,

πόλοις δ’ οὐτάμενοι χαλκήρεσιν ἐγχέισιν,

ἀνδρὲς ἀρημφατοί, βεβρωτωμένα τεῦχε’ ἐχόντες… “and they, the souls of the departed dead, gathered from the depths of Erebos: young women and young men, and the elderly who had known much suffering, and gentle maidens with their hearts bearing recent woes, and many warriors who had been wounded by bronze spears, <still> wearing their armor covered in blood” (*Od. 11*, 36–41).

Incidentally, the insertion of *Od. 11*, 38 between lines 6 and 8 of the cento is done with great delicacy towards the original context of *Iliad* 24, for it echoes the expanded designation of φίλοι who followed Priam in the apposition παῖδες καὶ γαμβροί (*Il. 24*, 331). At the same time, the original context of the line contributes to the intricate play that the author of the cento had created through a clever combination of the verses on the ambiguity of descent to the Underworld through dying (the normal way for mortals) and while still living, as a heroic (superhuman) feat. It is also worthwhile to question whether there might not be a subtle irony in νῦμφαι τ’ ἥθεοι τε with regard to Heracles who, in mythology, was well known to be a great lover both of girls and boys*27*, this type of sly allusion to Heracles’ amorous reputation would be in keeping with the irony of comparing him to a lion as he is on his way to abduct a dog.

The beginning of v. 8 (*Il. 24*, 328) differs from the Homeric vulgate: instead of the generic πόλλα’ ὀλοφυρόμενοι “weeping greatly” the cento reads οἴκτρ’ ὀλοφυρόμενοι “weeping pitifully”. Now, this expression is used elsewhere in the fixed formulaic position at the beginning of the verse, but almost exclusively of women’s lament*28*: it is only once applied by Odysseus to his

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*27* On the motif of Heracles the lover in Hellenistic and Roman poetry, see, e.g., G. K. Galinsky (1972): on Heracles’ love for young women, in particular, Dianeira and Iole, Galinsky 1972: 96, 154; on his love for Hylas, *ibid.* 117–118.

*28* οἴκτρ’ ὀλοφυρομένη (*Od. 4*, 719; 19, 543), and in the plural οἴκτρ’ ὀλοφυρόμεναι (*Od. 24*, 59).
comrades, as they weep (ὅικτρ’ ὀλοφυρομένους, Od. 10, 409), strengthening the impression of overemotional and unmanly behavior. Most Homeric manuscripts to Il. 24, 328 give πόλλ’ ὀλοφυρόμενοι as the only reading (see West 2000–2006: 2, 348, apparatus criticus ad loc.), and Eudocia in her cento had used the vulgate reading (lines 1734–1735); οἵκτρ’ ὀλοφυρόμενοι seems to have appeared only in Irenaeus’ cento, but M. L. West, judging from his apparatus criticus, seems to be open to treating it as an ancient variant reading. However, a look at the Latin translation of the cento suggests that the variant reading was introduced into the text of the cento after Irenaeus, possibly at the point when the passage was included in the Panarion: the line is translated plorantes multum, ac si mortem iret ad ipsam (see Harvey 1857: 87), where plorantes multum surely renders πόλλ’ ὀλοφυρόμενοι, not οἵκτρ’ ὀλοφυρόμενοι.

The second part of the verse, ὡς εἰ θάνατόνδε κιόντα, that in the Iliad reflected the feelings and apprehensions of those who were seeing Priam off is exquisitely reapplied by the author of the cento, for Heraclides is indeed going to the realm of death.

9. Ἐρμείας δ’ ἀπέπεμπεν, ἱδὲ γλαυκόπις Αθήνη. The line is taken from Heracles’ address to Odysseus as they meet in the Underworld. Asking Odysseus what brought him to the realm of the dead, Heracles remembers his own descent to Hades to abduct Cerberus:

καὶ ποτὲ μ’ ἐνθάδ’ ἐπεμψε κόν’ ἄξοντ’. οὐ γὰρ ἔτ’ ἄλλον φράζετο τοῦδε γέ μοι κρατερώτερον εἶναι ἄεθλον. 
τὸν μὲν ἐγὼν ἀνένεικα καὶ ἔγαγον ἐξ Λίδαο.
Ἐρμείας δὲ μ’ ἐπεμπεν ἱδὲ γλαυκόπις Αθήνη, “and once he [Eurystheus] sent me here, to bring back the hound: for he thought that no other task would be harder for me than this. And I carried him back up <to earth>, and led him out of Hades, and Hermes escorted me <on my way> and the owl-eyed Athena” (Od. 11, 623–626).

The cento is the only source to quote the line directly; but the choice is masterly. True, the author did need to modify δέ μ’

29 Cf. “pero si en el original la expresión ὡς εἰ θάνατόνδε κιόντα, « como si fuera a la muerte », tenía el significado metafórico propio de una hipérbole, dentro del centón pasa a tener un significado literal, ya que Heracles sí se encamina realmente hacia el mundo de los muertos” (Prieto Domínguez 2011: 109).
ἐπεμπένεν to δ’ ἀπέπεμπεν as the line had to depict Heracles on his way to accomplish the labor. But the very choice of the verse (the original context) points to the fact that he was successful in his enterprise and was able to recount it to Odysseus (while Heracles of the cento is apprehensive). Explicitly, the line is linked to v. 1, by the use of the verb ἀποπέμπω: by introducing a minor correction into Homer’s text, the author of the cento ingeniously contrives to use the verb ἀποπέμπω in the two meanings (“send away, turn away” and “send off, lead, escort”) in which it appeared in Od. 10, 73 and 76 (cf. n. 12). However, a reader who remembered the broader original context of v. 9 would have noticed the implicit connection between this verse and v. 4 (ἐξ’ Ἐρέβεως ἥξιοντα κόνα στυγερὸν Ἀ᾽δαο; cf. κόν’ ἥξιον’ in Od. 11, 632), and the mention of Athena (ἰδὲ γλαυκῶπις Αθήνη) strengthens the connection with Athena’s account of her role in Cerberus’ abduction Iliad 8 (cf. commentary on n. 4).

10. ἡδεε γὰρ κατὰ θυμὸν ἀδελφεῦν, ὡς ἐπονεῖτο. For the last line of the cento, the author chose a verse from a different passage where siblings support one another. The line was taken from Iliad 2, as Menelas, understanding the pressure his brother is under, stands by his side, showing support during the sacrifice to Zeus before the battle:

αὐτόματος δὲ οἱ ἡλθε βοήν ἄγαθος Μενέλαος·
ἡδεε γὰρ κατὰ θυμὸν ἀδελφεῦν ὡς ἐπονεῖτο “Menelas good at war cry joined him (lit. came to him) of his own accord: for he knew in his heart, how hard pressed <his brother> was” (II. 2, 408–409).

The verse seems to have been known: it is cited by Plutarch in the Quaestiones convivales (Plut. Mor. 706f), where the crucial point for his insertion of the quotation is the adjective αὐτόματος in v. 408, which he interprets as “of his own accord, i.e., without invitation”30. In the context of the cento the subject of the phrase is obviously Athena. By using this line to close his poem, the author of

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30 Plutarch does not directly quote II. 2, 408, but refers to it by using αὐτόματος in the authorial text: τὸν Μενέλαον Ὄμηρος πεποίηκεν αὐτόματον ἑστιόντι τοὺς ἀριστεῖς τῷ Ἀγαμέμνονι παραγινόμενον· ‘ἡδεε γὰρ κατὰ θυμὸν ἀδελφεῦν ὡς ἐπονεῖτο’, “Homer presented Menelas as coming without invitation (lit. of his own accord) to Agamemnon entertaining the chiefs of the army: ‘for he knew in his heart, how besieged by troubles his brother was’ ” (Plut. Mor. 706f).
the cento presented the relationship between Athena and Heracles as being closer than in Homer: a reader who remembered the original context of Il. 2, 409 would imagine Athena helping Heracles of her own accord, whereas in Homer she had been sent to his aid by Zeus (Il. 8, 364–365).

A careful analysis of the cento shows that its author knew his Homer extremely well, not merely stitching together disjoint lines, but also subtly evoking their original context. He shows great mastery in choosing and fitting together Homeric lines, so that the pastiche required minimal alterations in the Homeric text: he was obliged to modify δὲ μ’ ἔπεμπεν to δ’ ἀπέπεμπεν in v. 9, but this seems to be the only intervention (as we have shown, οἶκτρ’ ὀλοφυρόμενοι instead of Homer’s πόλλ’ ὀλοφυρόμενοι in v. 8 is probably an error that was introduced into the text of the cento after Irenaeus, either by Epiphanius himself, or alternatively, it might have been present in his copy of Irenaeus; similarly for ἀνά instead of κατά, and ἀνά instead of ἅμα in v. 6). The author of the cento also masterfully eschewed breaking the rule that required using only disjoint lines in the cento, by introducing Od. 11, 38 between Il. 24, 327 and 328 (v. 6 and 8 respectively). It also seems important to note the subtle, but, in our view, unmistakable irony with which the author of the cento treats his subject (curiously, this has not been emphasized in the previous works on the cento). The irony appears as early as v. 1, as Heracles’ intense emotional reaction is highlighted by βαρέα στενάχοντα; then follows the lion simile, presenting Heracles as a lion on his way to capture a dog; finally, the seems to be a tongue-in-cheek allusion to Heracles’ amorousness in νύμφαι τ’ ἡμεοι τε (v. 6), especially as it follows φίλοι of v. 5. This subtle and erudite irony would suggest a witty, cultivated, extremely well-educated and, most probably, pagan author who wrote the cento for the mere enjoyment of the form, with no serious (e.g. allegorical) intent. We would thus agree with Sowers and Prieto Domínguez who suggest that Irenaeus was using the cento as an example of a poetic technique that he could not fully approve of. True, in his comments following the cento he focuses on listing the original contexts of the lines that the author had used, and speaks of the danger that the less sophisticated readers might be fooled into believing that Homer had written about Heracles’ descent into Hades. However, the words οὐδὲν γὰρ κωλύει παραδείγματος χάριν ἐπιμνησθῆναι καὶ τούτων seem to show that as a cultivated reader he
was personally able enjoy the cento’s playful and witty reworking and reinterpretation of the Homeric verses.

References


