

Quilting Homer: Reading, Translating, and Remaking the *Homerocentones* of a Christian Bishop
a Roman Empress, and a Pagan Philosopher, among Others

The *Homerocentones*, usually attributed to the 5th-century Roman empress Eudocia, is a rich, experimental poem that is beginning to receive the attention it deserves. The *Centos* retells Christian salvation history from genesis to Jesus' ascension, in lines drawn exclusively from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, with only minor emendations to suit stylistic demands or transitions from Homeric to Christian ethic. This panel examines a variety of important themes in the *Centos* as well as a cento remake for modern audiences and the first English-language translation of the poem.

The first presenter considers the significance of select episodes from the *Cento* miracle stories in the original Homeric context, in the corresponding Bible story, and in the narrative of the *Centos* itself. The author examines how specific stories are sketched, colored with themes drawn from both the Homeric poems and Scripture, and how the stories change as the lens shifts from register to register. In working through the various levels of meaning in specific lines, the author highlights techniques and terms used to reflect the different ethical registers in the English translation.

Our second paper examines gender, particularly gender fluidity and ambiguity, in the *Centos*. The author argues that the heightened intertextual potential inherent to cento poetics allows us to read each biblical character as a hybrid composite of various Homeric actors. At times, the resulting bricolage of Homeric-biblical intertexts reinforces binary/rigid gender roles and, in so doing, supports patriarchy and misogyny. Elsewhere, the conflation of masculine/feminine voices produces a dynamic gender fluidity that can be seen as a subtle challenge or corrective to hierarchical models. The author focuses on five scenes within the

cento: the fall (Cento 33–87), the annunciation (Cento 202–268), the hemorrhaging woman (Cento 993–1045), the Samaritan woman at the well (Cento 1046–1152), and Mary mourning the crucified Jesus (Cento 2030–2073), and advances a provocative method for reading late antique Christian centos.

Our third paper examines the position of Eudocia and Augustine on the question of original sin and the fall. For the latter, Adam was almost singularly to blame, but for Eudocia, it was Eve. This distinction represents a theological break between Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Catholicism in the fourth and fifth century that Eudocia does not hesitate to emphasize: The centrality of Mary as the *theotokos*. In so doing, Eudocia depicts the mother of the Christ not as the bearer of culpability, but of redemption, thus becoming the “Queen of the Angels.” The Eastern Orthodox recognition of the pre-eminence of Mary is obviously not the work of Eudocia alone, nor is there evidence that she and Augustine were in actual dialogue. Yet her retelling of the story of the fall and the redemption may be seen as a corrective. It not only attempts to reconcile the rich Homeric and patristic tradition of her Greek forebears but also highlights the cultural schism in contemporary Christianity that is at best only partially explicable in mainstream historical sources.

Our fourth paper examines the depiction of the suitors in the *Odyssey*, that of the apostles in biblical Scripture, and then explores how two apparently contradictory associations are cleverly juxtaposed without compromising the integrity of either the *Odyssey* or Scripture. The *Centos* normally refer to the suitors as good, with the exception of the story of the deception of Eve, where the Homeric lines imply a connection between the serpent and the suitors. The author argues that the suitors in the *Odyssey* have been converted/saved in the *Centos*’ NT stories and are on the path to enlightenment and salvation. The term “suitors” (μνηστῆρες) is emended

at least six times in the *Centos* to “servants” (δρηστυῆρες), which identifies them with the wicked multitude in pursuit of earthly goods. The author demonstrates that the distinction between suitors and servants demonstrates a range of spiritual enlightenment from the mundane to the transcendental.

In our fifth presentation two libretti are discussed: *Voces Vergilianae*, a Vergilian cento composed for an opera that premiered in 1997, and *NERON KAISAR*, a centonizing treatment of "standards" from Greek and Latin lyric poetry, put on the lips of the opera's interlocutors as dialogue/recitative, arias, and chorus as if characters spoke in "Classics" to one another naturally in context (the theme being Nero as performer, for whom life imitates art). *NERON* premiered recently in Oxford but remains a work in progress. This presenter also discusses a picture book for young readers on classical themes, *POEM: A Mashup*, a rhyming cento of popular lines drawn from famous English-language poems on the theme of the *Ars Poetica*. The book's prospectus and text are provided for the audience's hopeful amusement.