

DE INCONEXIS CONTINUUM

A Study of the Late Antique Latin Wedding Centos

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ABSTRACT

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The kind of literature that is called cento is studied in this thesis with a special focus on two late antique Latin wedding poems, *Cento Nuptialis* written by Ausonius in the late 4th century A.D., and *Epithalamium Fridi* probably written in Carthage some hundred years later. These two poems are the only late antique Latin centos which belong to the same genre; they are therefore investigated with the aim of showing how centos belonging to the same genre may relate in different ways to both their text of origin and their genre.

The method used is based on the belief that centos are best described as ‘open works,’ with a wide ‘field of possibilities.’ In the analyses a hermeneutical approach is applied, and the Model Reader’s interpretations are in focus.

The two wedding centos relate in different ways to text of origin and genre. Associations which forecast the events of the part of the poem called *Imminutio*, a ‘notion of combat’, and the double circumstances lying behind the composition of the poem are found crucial for the interpretation of *Cento Nuptialis*. The humour of the *Imminutio* part is explained as a result of incongruity between cento, text of origin and genre-expectations. In *Epithalamium Fridi*, it is shown that the text of origin is subordinated to the panegyric scope of the *epithalamium of occasion*.

Some general conclusions are cautiously suggested. These concern: various kinds of reinterpretation of the text of origin through the lens of a cento; different kinds of guidance for the interpretation of a cento; and different functions for which centos may be particularly apt, e.g. subversive and humorous poems.