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AUSONIUS AT NIGHT

SCOTT MCGILL

Abstract. This article examines the fourth-century C.E. Ausonius' descriptions of himself as a nocturnal poet. Interest lies in passages where Ausonius relates that he wrote at night in order to play the part of the modest, self-deprecating author. Past scholarship has generally dismissed Ausonius' modesty as insincere and empty or stopped at identifying it with the *captatio benevolentiae*. I will go further in exploring the rhetorical dimensions of Ausonius' theme. The examination contributes to the study of paratextuality in Latin antiquity and to our understanding of Ausonius' authorial identity, of the functions he assigns to poetry, of his methods of shaping the reception of his work, and of his literary culture.

USELESS. EMBARRASSING. COARSE, ROUGH, DRIVELLING TRASH, and wearying to read. These are some of the ways that the fourth-century C.E. Decimus Magnus Ausonius describes his own poetry.¹ Those descriptions belong to a code of modesty—abject, self-denigrating modesty—that defines Ausonius' portrayal of his texts and of himself as an author. Most of the moments where he disparages his work appear in the over twenty prefaces and dedicatory epistles in both verse and prose that he attached to his poems.² Still others come in Ausonius' letters,

¹“Useless” comes from the second dedicatory epistle attached to the *Technopaegnon* (*misi ad te Technopaegnon, inertis otii mei inutile opusculum*, 1–2); “embarrassing” from the dedicatory epistle attached to the *Bissula* (*meis etiam intra me erubescio*, 15–16); “coarse, rough, drivelling trash” from a preface attached to an unknown poem (*at nos illepidum rudem libellum, / burras quisquilias ineptiasque*, *Praef. Var.* 4.4–5; see also the dedicatory epistle to the *Griphus* 6–8); and “wearying to read” from the prose preface to the *Parentalia* (*fastidiose legantur*, 1). Nugent 1990, 44, produces a similar list. I use the text of Green 1999 and, thus, his line numbers for the prose material and his ordering of Ausonius' epistles. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

²Prefaces are attached to the *Commemoratio Professorum Burdigalensium*, *Epicedion in Patrem*, *Parentalia*, and (arguably) the *Epigrammata*. Dedicatory prefaces—that is, prefatory passages addressed to dedicatees, often cast in one way or another as epistles—appear before the *Bissula* (which has three prefaces, and perhaps another in *Ep.* 5a), *Caesares*, *Cento Nuptialis*, *Cupido Cruciatius*, *Griphus*, *Ludus Septem Sapientum*, *Protrepticus ad Nepotem*, and *Technopaegnon* (which also has three prefaces). Ausonius also writes an epistolary preface to his reader in connection with the *Epitaphia*. Finally, there are (by

where he tells the addressee about a piece of poetry that he has sent with the epistle.³

It should be obvious that Ausonius did not intend to be taken at his word when he wrote in such humble and disparaging terms in his many paratexts.⁴ But just what did he want to say, and just what effects did he want his self-puncturing modesty to have? To arrive at answers to these questions, we must recognize that the modesty is more than empty air and explore its pragmatic dimensions, or what it was designed to do rhetorically in its textual settings.⁵ To take this approach is to move away from the older view that Ausonius' modesty is "mere" rhetoric—insincere and devoid of any real substance—and toward appreciating that it is rhetoric in a robust sense: through it, he directs his readers toward viewing him and his poetry in particular ways.⁶

In this article, I will explore a set of pragmatic functions that Ausonius gives to his modesty. A central aim is to show that Ausonius molds his pose to fit unique textual, rhetorical, and historical circumstances, which are determined by the identity of both the poem and the addressee, and to convey different messages in those different discursive settings. My focus will lie upon a particular way that Ausonius deprecates his poetry in three passages: by relating that he composed his work wholly or in part at night. In demonstrating that Ausonius puts that detail to distinct pragmatic ends in each passage, I will illustrate how rhetorically rich and varied his modesty could be: while claiming in three instances to be a

Green's count) five *praefationes variae*, or prefaces whose place in the Ausonian corpus is unclear. Ausonius attaches conclusions or epilogues, meanwhile, to the *Cento Nuptialis*, which also has a prose parechasis or digression after line 100, *Commemoratio Professorum Burdigalensium*, and *Fasti*. On Ausonius' prefaces, see Pavlovskis 1967, 545–52; Green 1980, 191–211; Nugent 1990, 42–45; Sivan 1992, 83–101.

³See *Ep.* 5a, 9a, 14a, and 19a. (There is also an inset poem that Ausonius introduces in *Ep.* 13.65–70.)

⁴The term "paratext" comes from Genette 1997. It describes accompanying material to a main text. The places in Ausonius' letters where he tells an addressee about a piece of poetry that he has sent with his epistle can be considered paratexts, since the passages operate as prefaces to the work.

⁵Genette 1997, 2, emphasizes the pragmatic dimensions of paratexts. See also Nugent 1990, 45, who argues that reader-oriented criticism, in which the focus lies upon what a text does to a reader, provides a productive avenue for approaching Ausonius' modesty.

⁶For the older view, see Evelyn-White 1919–21, 1:xxxv, n. 1; Isbell 1974, 41 (cited in n. 17) and 48–49. The critics mentioned in my n. 2 above have to varying degrees explored the rhetorical dimensions of Ausonius' prefaces. Knight 2006, 369–85, effectively examines the prose preface to the *Bissula* and *Ep.* 5a along such lines.

nocturnal poet, he gives each passage particular contours and purposes. Whether or not Ausonius actually wrote his poetry at night is, at most, a secondary issue. What matters is what he was doing with the idea, the significance and functions with which he invested it.⁷ Exploring these matters will yield insights into Ausonius' self-presentation as a poet, into his relations with certain contemporaries, into ways that poetry could mark and sustain fellowship among the elite in the fourth century, and into the approaches that he took to secure favorable responses to his work.

I

One of the texts in which Ausonius presents himself as a nocturnal author is the "Address to His Paper" (προσωποποιία *in chartam*). This is a sixteen-line dedicatory preface to Proculus Gregorius, written in elegiac couplets. Gregorius was Ausonius' friend and ally from the 370s who, perhaps with Ausonius' support, became "Prefect of the Provisions" (*praefectus annonae*) at Rome in 377 and prefect of Gaul in 383. He was then in line for the consulship in 384, although he ended up not holding the office.⁸ The location of the preface in the Ausonian corpus is unclear: different manuscripts attach it to different texts, and in some cases do not even have it introducing a work, despite its obvious prefatory character.⁹ The name προσωποποιία *in chartam* is also uncertain, because it appears in only some manuscripts. It has, however, become the conventional title for the preface.¹⁰

⁷My examination expands upon Ker 2004, 209–42, on how prose writers in imperial Rome up to Aulus Gellius portrayed themselves as nocturnal authors.

⁸On Proculus Gregorius, see *PLRE* i.404 and Sivan 1993, 126, 134, 140. Gregorius was also *quaestor sacri palatii* in 379. He ended up not becoming consul presumably because of the assassination of the emperor Gratian in 383. Pastorino 1971, 790, strangely identifies the Proculus in the προσωποποιία with Proculus of Lycia, who was *comes orientis* of 383–84 and was killed by Rufinus in 392 (*PLRE* i.746). There is every reason to believe that the Gallic Proculus Gregorius was instead Ausonius' man, as he was in other poems (see n. 33), and as Pastorino 1971, 49, suggests he was, in contrast to his later remarks. So Green 1991, 243–44; Sivan 1992, 99; Sivan 1993, 211, n. 46. An attempt to identify Pacatus as the recipient of the προσωποποιία, based on an emendation to a variant reading of line 9 of the poem, is misguided; see Green 1991, 244.

⁹Green 1991, 243, is succinct and informative on this topic. In Green's edition, the poem is the fifth of Ausonius' *praefationes variae*.

¹⁰The poem is a rhetorical prosopopoeia to the extent that the inanimate object, the *charta*, is made to speak in lines 3 and 7–8 and is invested with personified behavior in 3–4. But the rest of the piece does not match up with the rhetorical exercise and just finds Ausonius addressing the paper.

As that title indicates, Ausonius addresses his *charta* or sheet of writing paper in his dedicatory poem. He opens by asserting that, if destruction in the form of worms (*tineae*) and decay (*caries*) is the inevitable lot for the paper, it should first begin to perish owing to his own verses: *si tineas cariemque pati te, charta, necesse est, / incipe versiculis ante perire meis* (1–2). With the *si*-clause introducing an assumed fact, the message is that the *charta* is faced with a double death: one at the hands of Ausonius' poetry and one from the worms and decay. This is to denigrate that poetry by implying that it was bad enough to kill the *charta*, as well as by suggesting that it will not achieve anything like immortality. In fact, it will disappear as an unread, neglected text, much as, for instance, Horace says his book of epistles will be worm-eaten once it has lost its youth and fallen out of fashion (*aut tineas pascet taciturnus inertis*, *Ep.* 1.20.12).¹¹

The *charta* responds to Ausonius by stating that it would prefer to die by the worms than by Ausonius' poetry—a position that the author applauds as a wise one, since the *tineae* would be a lesser evil (3–4): “*malo,*” *inquis*, “*tineis.*” *sapis, aerumnose libelle, / perfungi mavis qui levioe malo.* Ausonius then extends the self-deflation still further when he states that he does not want to waste the evening hours he spent writing his poetry and, thus, throwing away sleep and oil, only to have the *charta* assert that sleeping would have been a better choice (5–8):

ast ego damnosae nolo otia perdere Musae,
iacturam somni quae parit atque olei.
“utilius dormire fuit quam perdere somnum
atque oleum.”

But I do not want to throw away the leisure devoted to the prodigal Muse, who makes me lose sleep and oil. “It would have been more profitable to sleep than to throw away the sleep and the oil.”

Ausonius' approach is to disparage his poetry now by describing its nocturnal origins rather than its inevitable ignominious end. It was common enough for ancient authors to relate that they worked at night. Often, emphasis lay upon the author's diligence: to write at night was to work laboriously, to “burn the midnight oil” (*lucubrare*).¹² Ausonius himself uses the theme of nocturnal writing in just that manner when he writes to

¹¹ Coleman 1988, 227, notes that the destruction of unfashionable literature by bookworms was a *topos* in Latin literature, and that “worms and rot are habitually named as sources of destruction for cloth.”

¹² See Ziolkowski 1990, 10–20; Ker 2004, 210 (citing Janson 1964, 97).

his son Hesperius that he worked late and, thus, worked hard to produce the *Fasti* for Hesperius' edification.¹³ Here, however, the Ausonius who writes at night is far from a diligent, industrious poet. As he tells it, the poetry that he does not want to waste sprang from what he had already wasted. His Muse is prodigal (*damnosa*), and she produces loss (*iacturam* . . . *parit*) by causing him to sacrifice his sleeping hours and fritter away the oil for his lamp. The association of his nocturnal poetry with loss and waste presents Ausonius as someone inappropriately devoted to the vain and superfluous: a poet who squanders both his time and lamp oil in writing his verses is a poet who expends too much energy on fruitless, throwaway material.¹⁴ This is the evil twin of productive *lucubratio*. Ausonius' is an "undignified leisure" (*otium sine dignitate*), the kind of useless leisure that was deplored in Roman moral discourse, and a waste of time all the more marked for occurring at night, when he profligately extended the day while he should have curtailed his writing and done something more useful, namely, sleep in the dark.¹⁵

One way of approaching Ausonius' self-deprecation here and in the preceding lines is through the lens of the *captatio benevolentiae*.¹⁶ Prescribed for orators in rhetorical theory and common in Latin literary prefaces, the *captatio* was designed ostensibly to secure the goodwill of the audience by showing that the author was humble and, thus, sympathetic. With Ausonius, however, the protestations of modesty are so overdone that they take on a powerful air of irony and give the unmistakable impression that the reader was not to view the poet as the self-effacing person he made himself out to be.¹⁷ The *captationes* were rather to be

¹³ *Sit tuus hic fructus, vigilatas accipe noctes; / obsequitur studio nostra lucerna tuo* ("Let this be your profit, receive the work of my wakeful nights. My lamp burns in the service of your study," *F.* 1.5–6). I follow Dräger 2011 in considering this poem a conclusion rather than an introduction to the *Fasti*. The poem was dedicated twice, once to Gregorius and once to Hesperius.

¹⁴ It seems very unlikely that Ausonius wrote the poetry he was dedicating to Gregorius only at night. But the important point is that he chose to represent his writing of it in that manner and did so in a self-denigrating way.

¹⁵ My comments here and in the previous sentence echo Ker 2004, 216–18. Ausonius explicitly refers to the bad use of his leisure in line 15 (*quod nobis superest ignobilis oti*; see n. 28). But the sense that he has wasted his nights in unproductive *otium* is clear enough in lines 5–8 as well. On the link between the *ludus poeticus* and *otium* in Latin literature, see Wagenvoort 1956, 30.

¹⁶ A classic source on the *captatio* is Curtius 1953, 83–85. In his treatment of authorial addresses to their books, Citroni 1986, 140, emphasizes the element of modesty in Ausonius' προσωποποιία.

¹⁷ Isbell 1974, 41, recognizes as much, although disapprovingly: "It seems an exercise in vanity; by appearing humble, he invited if not compelled the reader to insist that the

seen as performances in which Ausonius played the part of the modest author in an ironist's amplified strains. Ausonius presumably felt that he would score points by taking a stance that was appropriate for a writer venturing to send out a text, however insincere the actual sentiment.¹⁸ Yet the overstatement also points to the wish to have his reader look beneath his irony and understand that his poetry could never warrant such ostentatious humility and, in fact, had to be significantly better than he said it was.

It would be a mistake, however, to stop here when investigating the rhetorical nature and purposes of Ausonius' modest stance in the *προσωποποιία*. This becomes evident as the preface proceeds and Ausonius enlists his *captatio* to make a point about his relationship with Gregorius (7–12):

“utilius dormire fuit quam perdere somnum
atque oleum.” bene ais, causa sed ista mihi est.
irascor Proculo, cuius facundia tanta est
quantus honos: scripsit plurima quae cohibet.
hunc studeo ulcisci. et prompta est ultio vati:
qui sua non edit carmina, nostra legat.

“It would have been more profitable to slumber than to throw away the sleep and oil.” You have a point. But this is my reason: I am angry with Proculus, whose eloquence is as great as his rank. He has written many things that he keeps to himself. I want to punish him. And the punishment for a poet is at hand: let him who does not send out his own poetry read mine.

By deprecating his poetry as he does, Ausonius sets it up as a punishment for Gregorius, who, Ausonius complains, has opted against sharing any of his own work. To introduce the idea that he sends his poetry to penalize Gregorius, Ausonius imitates Horace *Epistles* 2.2.54: *ni melius dormire putem quam scribere versus* (“if I should not think it better to sleep than to write verses”). This is to add allusive texture to the preface by reversing the narrative situation found in the source poem: whereas Horace explains

poems are not tedious. In the end, however, a charming ingenuity becomes finally cloying.” See also Evelyn-White 1919–21, 1:xxxv, n. 1; Nugent 1990, 44; Knight 2006, 376, citing La Penna 1993, 745.

¹⁸The fifth-century Sidonius Apollinaris (*Ep.* 9.11.4) relates that modesty was appropriate for an author publishing his work: *pariter illud nosse vos noveram, quod auctores in operibus edendis pudor potius quam constantia decet* (“besides, I knew that you knew that modesty rather than fearlessness befits authors when publishing their works”).

to his addressee Florus why he has not sent him any poetry, Ausonius chides his addressee Gregorius for not sending his verses to him. While *edere* can mean “to publish,” the allusion suggests that Ausonius has it refer simply to sending out a text privately to a single recipient. This is how he also uses the verb in *Epistles* 13.97, where he directs his friend Theon to dispatch some verses (*verum protinus ede quod requiro*).

It was a convention in late antique epistolography to complain about an addressee’s reticence in sending letters and to call for longer and more frequent correspondence.¹⁹ Ausonius’ complaint appears to be a variation on that epistolary theme. The purpose was surely not to express real pique (*irascor Proculo*, 9) in conventional dress; Ausonius is bantering in the preface, not venting. But the complaint was something more than just a moment of ironic play that set the conditions for Ausonius to activate his faux modesty and create a witty punishment for Gregorius: it was also a means of demonstrating Ausonius’ friendship with his addressee, with friendship defined in that period by mutual attention and concern, willingness to give support when needed, and often, but not always, shared interests and affection. Like letters in late antiquity, poetry helped to establish and maintain networks of communication among friends over a distance. Sending a person the work one had written generated social contact and showed that the sender was attentive to the recipient.²⁰ By dispatching his poetry to Gregorius in the form of a dedication, Ausonius was clearly performing such an act of friendship (*amicitia*) behind all his feinting irony.²¹ At the same time, his expectation that Gregorius should

¹⁹ Nine entries in Symmachus’ first book of letters (1.23, 45, 59, 61, 80, 83, 85, 91, 98) provide representative support for the point. The convention reflects and gives expression to an aspect of late antique epistolary protocol: see Knight 2005, 365–66, who observes that in Latin antiquity “frequency of epistolary exchange is one of the obligations of friendship” and suggests that the “failure to respond to a letter is not only a breach of good manners, but an offense against friendship itself.”

²⁰ I echo Löhr on Ebbeler 2012 in *BMC* 2013.02.45, as well as Sivan 1992, 97. Ebbeler 2007 and 2012 and Conybeare 2000 contain much useful material on late antique epistolography and the ways that letters served to forge community. Green 1980, 205, observes that, for Ausonius, the exchange of poetry was integral to the concept of *amicitia*. On friendship in Roman antiquity, see Williams 2012.

²¹ Worth citing here is a letter of Cicero to Varro in April 46 (*Fam.* 9.2.1 = *Ep.* 177.1 SB). Cicero had received a late-night visit from Caninius, who told him that he was going the next day to visit Varro. In response to that news, Cicero wrote a letter that evening for Caninius to deliver, only to have Caninius not come back to get it. When Caninius then appeared a few days later and said that he was off to see Varro, Cicero decided that he did not want to waste the letter that he had written at night (*tamen perire lucubrationem meam nolui*), even though its news was old, and instead chose to have Caninius deliver it.

be sending him poetry further reveals that they had friendship ties. The verb *cohibet*, as well as *non edit*, points to someone who simply wanted to keep his poetry to himself, with modesty or diffidence the logical reasons for it.²² Yet this prevents him from acting as the friend he is and reaching out to Ausonius with the verses he had written. The animating idea is that the reticent Gregorius has failed to do what he should have done given his and Ausonius' ties. This message underlines for Gregorius, and for the general audience who would read the preface with the circulating poem, what the dedication itself demonstrated: Ausonius and Gregorius shared a bond as *amici*.²³ The playful irony in the passage then signals how friendly they were on the personal level. The comfort that Ausonius felt in issuing his joking complaint is that of someone who was on familiar terms with his addressee, who saw Gregorius as someone he knew well enough to approach as he did.²⁴

The reference in line 10 to Gregorius' high rank (*quantus honos*) indicates that Ausonius wrote the dedicatory preface to him when he was enjoying political success. Perhaps the poem even dates to 383, when Gregorius was prefect of Gaul. Gregorius' *honos* at the time of the dedication gives Ausonius' complaint a political dimension. The poet advertises his connection to a friend (and possible protégé) who had risen to high rank, thereby demonstrating his connections to power.²⁵

As Ker 2004, 229, recognizes, for Cicero, even an obsolete letter strengthens *amicitia* by meeting the obligation of contact. The rhetorical situation, of course, is entirely different in Ausonius. Still, his preface and Cicero's letter can be viewed together due to how their authors offer glimpses into the workings of ancient *amicitia* when talking about how they sent out texts that they wrote at night and did not want to waste.

²²As Knight 2006, 375, observes, it was a convention for late antique authors to express reluctance to publish. Ausonius similarly complains that Tetradius sends him no poetry in *Ep.* 11.29–33 and demands that Theon send him some in *Ep.* 13.97–100 (although the whole letter is a playful attack on Theon for not doing so; see also *Ep.* 14a).

²³It is safe to assume that Ausonius meant to have the dedicatory preface circulate with the poem, since this was customary, and that this in fact happened, at least for a while. How the preface was then separated from its poem is of course lost to us.

²⁴I am influenced by the remarks of Knight 2005, 363, on “the banter associated with friendship-writing.” See also Salzman and Roberts 2011, 60, on Symmachus' bantering complaint to Ausonius in *Ep.* 1.23 about the shortness of Ausonius' letter: “However, Symmachus's insistence on longer letters is an epistolary commonplace that also intimates how close the correspondents are; only intimates could joke and complain so openly.”

²⁵It is entirely reasonable that Ausonius or a posthumous editor would have been comfortable including the preface in a collected edition of Ausonius' poems put out after 384, despite Gregorius' inability to secure the consulship for that year. The preface would still show that Ausonius had been connected to someone who had accumulated significant

At the same time, the complaint that Gregorius had sent him no poetry might have been a way of reminding the politically active Gregorius to keep Ausonius in his circle and to reach out to him in the future. While the dedication implies a living relationship, and while the bantering tone and content in the preface shows that the two men were personally close, Ausonius would have also made a political calculation when choosing Gregorius as his dedicatee and would have formulated his complaint in part to figure his desire to have the *honos*-rich man continue to keep in touch with him. If the preface was written in 383, when Ausonius was in semi-retirement after achieving much political power in the 370s and holding the consulship in 379,²⁶ it would suggest a situation where he was looking to maintain a political ally while he himself was at some kind of remove from the arena of office holding. In the preface, the currency of his friendship with Gregorius is literary. For Ausonius, shared poetic interests could cement friendship ties; and the literary accomplishments that he identifies in Gregorius (*cuius facundia tanta est / quantus honos*, 9–10) assign to him the kind of cultural capital that was valued in contemporary elite circles.²⁷ Yet the call for more communication as poets can be read as well as a call for continued ties to the world of politics and power.

Having depicted Gregorius as a talented writer, Ausonius proceeds to end the preface by making him an authoritative reader (13–16):

huius in arbitrio est, seu te iuvenescere cedro
 seu iubeat duris vermibus esse cibum.
 huic ego, quod nobis superest ignobilis oti,
 deputo, sive legat quae dabo sive tegat.

It is up to him, whether to bid you to reach maturity with cedar oil or to be food for cruel worms. I assign to him what is left of my worthless leisure, either to read what I will give him or to conceal it.

honos, irrespective of what happened in 384. On the ancient publication history of Ausonius' poems, see Green 1991, xliii–xliv. The manuscript tradition of Ausonius' poetry is notoriously complicated; Green xli–xliii gives a helpful overview.

²⁶ On Ausonius' life and career, see Green 1991, xxiv–xxxii.

²⁷ I echo Salzman and Roberts 2011, xlv and xlvi, on the place of literary interests and accomplishments in Symmachan *amicitia* and on those interests and accomplishments as elite cultural capital. Gregorius was an orator, and according to Symmachus (*Ep.* 3.17–22), a fine one. Ausonius alludes to Gregorius' eloquence with the word *facundia*, but shows that he wrote verse as well.

Ausonius now puts himself in a subordinate position to Gregorius by giving him the power to determine if the poem that Ausonius dedicated to him would be circulated or suppressed. The phrase, *quod nobis superest ignobilis oti*, picks up on the nocturnal *iactura* described earlier in the preface and presents Ausonius' composition as the meager outcome of the prodigal "waste and loss."²⁸ This ends the passage on a self-deprecatory note like that at its beginning while also varying the theme of decay and destruction found in the previous lines: Ausonius' poetry can now avoid destruction by worms, depending on what Gregorius decides to do with it.

The choice that Ausonius gives Gregorius is an example of a Latin prefatory convention in which authors left it up to their addressees to determine whether a text would be circulated or suppressed; another Ausonian instance appears in a verse preface to Drepanius Pacatus (*Lud.* 3–4, 17–18).²⁹ Of course, Ausonius expected Gregorius to circulate his poetry, rather than to hold it back and consign it to the worms. But giving Gregorius sway over the fate of the poetry was more than a "polite farce."³⁰ While Gregorius was not really to exercise his judgment in the way Ausonius described, to call on him to do so was to bring attention to the duties of publication that he had as a dedicatee. In that capacity, Gregorius was to play an important role in the circulation of Ausonius' text by having copies made of it (*te iuvenescere cedro*).³¹ The glimpse is into the personal channels of publication in ancient Rome, when authors sent their works to dedicatees and others with the understanding that those recipients would generate copies and set in motion the process of dissemination.³² That Ausonius gave Gregorius the crucial role in the

²⁸The phrase *ignobile otium* appears also in line 392 of the *Mosella*; Ausonius presumably derived it from Vergil's sphragis to the *Georgics* (4.564). Green 1991, 244, understands Ausonius to mean that he will submit all his future work to Gregorius. But lines 15–16 surely follow up on 13–14 in referring to the present work, while *ignobilis oti* picks up on the picture of nocturnal writing at the beginning of the poem.

²⁹In *Praef. Var.* 4.17, meanwhile, Ausonius calls upon Drepanius Pacatus to edit a poem and states that he "will hide what needs forgiveness and will pass on what he approves" (*ignoscenda teget, probata tradet*). See also lines 1–4 of the verse preface to the *Ludus Septem Sapientum*, addressed to the same figure. Janson 1964, 108–9, and Pavlovskis 1967, 539, 542, 554, deal with how other Latin authors leave it up to the recipient to publish or suppress a text.

³⁰I quote Evelyn-White 1919–21, 1:xxxv, on Ausonius' invitation to Drepanius Pacatus in the *Ludus* either to circulate or to suppress his poem.

³¹Cedar-oil was protective, as Green 1991, 244, observes, and, thus, helped to preserve texts. The idea with *iuvenescere* appears to be that the text will be able to reach maturity, i.e., to survive over time with the help of the oil.

³²On late antique publication and the roles played by authors' dedicatees and other friends, see Mathisen 1993, 112–13. On the production and circulation of texts in

survival of his poetry was a way of highlighting through overstatement the responsibilities to Ausonius and his text that the dedicatee had. At the same time, it was to bring out Gregorius' authority with regard to the text, how he held a privileged place among the circle of recipients who were to circulate it. Gregorius' position as dedicatee reinforces that the two men had a bond. The sense is that Ausonius is close enough to Gregorius not only to expect poetry from him but also to dedicate poetry to him, with the assumption that Gregorius would honor the spirit of fellowship and community that infuses the dedication.³³ While Ausonius is being playfully ironic to the end, he continues to convey what he did when claiming to punish Gregorius with his nocturnal poetry: the preface and dedication are manifestations of an established and ongoing *amicitia*.

II

Sustaining another bond of *amicitia* is the central concern when Ausonius sends a poem that, he claims, he wrote at night to Paulinus of Nola. These two men had a decades-long association that stretched from the 350s (when Ausonius, a teacher in Bordeaux at that point, came to know the young Paulinus) into the 390s. A rich store of epistolary correspondence, much of it in verse, provides valuable information about their relationship, as well as about each one's modes of self-presentation to the other. This material includes the well-known verse epistles written after Paulinus' conversion to an ascetic form of Christianity while living in Spain in 389. In his texts, Ausonius complains about the lack of letters or visits from Paulinus and charges that he was "deserting a common cultural heritage in favour of what is presented as a more radical brand of Christianity,"³⁴ while Paulinus, when he does respond to Ausonius, justifies his new religious turn. Recent scholarship has questioned whether the two endured any real break due to Paulinus' conversion.³⁵ We might certainly wonder whether Ausonius was in part varying the *topos* mentioned earlier,

ancient Rome generally, see Fedeli 1989, 343–78, and several of the chapters in Johnson and Parker 2009.

³³ Ausonius dedicates two other poems to Gregorius (*Cupido Cruciatu*s and *Fasti*), which deepens the sense of a bond between them, cultivated and manifested in part by Ausonius' dedication of poetry to his friend.

³⁴ Knight 2005, 362–63.

³⁵ On Paulinus and Ausonius, see e.g., Pastorino 1971, 50–70; Green 1980, 207–10; Trout 1999, esp. 28–29, 55–59, 68–84, 86–89; Conybeare 2000, 51–52, 147–57; Amherdt 2004; Knight 2005, 367–401; Ebbeler 2007, 303–15; Filosiini 2008; Rücker 2009, 83–108, and 2012.

in which the writer calls for more letters from his addressee. But his treatment of Paulinus' silence is far more elaborate and sustained than the *topos* is elsewhere, which indicates that there was something more to the complaints and that the lack of communication was a significant personal matter to him. What is more, there is a biographical specificity suggestive of historical reality in the focus on Paulinus' Christianity and its effect on a relationship rooted in a common investment in classical culture. As I read the letters, then, they reveal actual gaps in contact, a certain strain on the pair's relationship, and a struggle to come to terms with what Paulinus' new Christian identity meant to that bond.³⁶

The letter in which Ausonius refers to his nocturnal writing predates the conversion of Paulinus (*Ep.* 19a).³⁷ It shows the two still in active and warm contact as cultural elites with shared interests and sensibilities. Ausonius begins by thanking Paulinus for a gift of olive oil and Spanish fish sauce. He then applauds a poem that Paulinus sent with the gift in the effusively complimentary strains that were part of the code of late antique elite *amicitia*, going so far as to swear that the piece "will never be imitable by anyone, even though that person admits that it should be imitated" (*iuro omnia nulli umquam imitabile futurum, etsi fateatur imitandum*, 19–20). As if that were not flattery enough, Ausonius goes on to respond to Paulinus' request that he comment on the poem by asserting that he will do as Paulinus requested, even though he cannot improve, and will add nothing to, a piece of such finish and perfection (20–24).

In the meantime, Ausonius continues, he will send Paulinus a "douceur" (*corollarium*) of iambic verses while he begins to work on the poem in hexameters that Paulinus awaits (*quod a me heroico metro desideras*, 26–27). The piece constitutes a kind of tip paid on top of what was actually due, namely, the hexameter poem.³⁸ According to Ausonius, the iambs are the result of a single night's work and have received no further attention from him (24–30):

³⁶To maintain that literary and rhetorical embellishment of the kind that appears in the epistles—and there is much of it—could not coexist with actual experience and actual feeling is to misunderstand how personal writing worked in ancient literature: to mediate the personal with the literary and the rhetorical was, of course, entirely the norm.

³⁷Line 15 of an inset poem within the letter (*Ep.* 19b), where Ausonius relates that Paulinus was at his retreat in Hebrumagus, a town between Toulouse and Narbonne, shows as much (as does the picture in the letter, which will come into view shortly, of Ausonius and Paulinus' frequent correspondence, with poetry included).

³⁸Cf. *OLD* s.v. *corollarium* 2.

Interea tamen, ne sine corollario poetico tabellarius tuus rediret, paucis iambicis praeludendum putavi, dum illud quod a me heroico metro desideras incohatur. isti tamen—ita te et Hesperium salvos habeam, quod spatio lucubrationculae unius effusi (quamquam hoc ipsi de se probabunt)—tamen nihil diligentiae ulterioris habuerunt. vale.

But in the meantime, so that your messenger not return without a *douceur* of verse, I thought that I should compose a prelude in a few iambics, while the hexameter work that you await from me is beginning. But they—so may I have you and Hesperius healthy, that I dashed them off in the space of a single evening (although they themselves will prove this)—they have had no further attention given to them. Farewell.

The diminutive *lucubrationcula* and the verb *effundere* convey that Ausonius wrote the poem quickly and took only a small part of the night to do so.³⁹ Nocturnal composition is here represented differently from how it was in the προσωποποιία. Rather than being a waste of time, the writing constitutes just a brief expenditure of time: speed is now the central characteristic, not wasteful frivolity. The decadence of the προσωποποιία author is nowhere to be found in this picture of the poet taking just some of his evening to write his verses. The night is now when Ausonius composes offhandedly and hastily, with the implication that his work was the product of little effort or attention.

Fast composition is elsewhere in Latin literature a marker of minor, occasional poetry.⁴⁰ An example appears in the preface to Book 1 of Statius' *Silvae*, a text that Ausonius in fact imitates in his self-deprecatory *quamquam hoc ipsi de se probabunt*.⁴¹ This derives from Statius' similar statement about his fears that his works will show that he wrote them hastily (*quam timeo ne verum istuc versus quoque ipsi de se probent*, 15–16).⁴²

³⁹ Cf. OLD s.v. *effundere* 6b, on how the verb emphasizes the hasty nature of an utterance. The diminutive, meanwhile, indicates in connection with *effusi* that Ausonius spent only a little time on the poem. As Pavlovskis 1967, 546–47, observes, Ausonius is given to noting the spontaneity and speed of his compositions. Janson 1964, 146, notes that the use of diminutives to refer to texts becomes common in prefaces of the second and third centuries and continues thereafter (although he does not cite this Ausonian example).

⁴⁰ White 1974, 42.

⁴¹ I use the text (and, thus, the line numbers to this prose preface) of Shackleton Bailey 2003.

⁴² Statius refers to the speed of composition when he describes his *libelli* as *qui mihi subito calore et quadam festinandi voluptate fluxerunt* (“[pieces] that flowed from me in the heat of the moment and with a certain pleasure in the rush,” 3–4); when he asserts that his poems, when read, will lose their one redeeming quality, quickness of composition (*gratiam celeritatis*, 13–14); and when he states that no poem took longer than two days to write,

What is more, Ausonius' use of *praeludere* to describe how he wrote iambics in contrast to hexameters echoes Statius' comments in the same preface on epic poets who, like him, produced lighter pieces ("and there is not one of our illustrious poets who did not compose some prelude to his works in a lighter vein," *nec quisquam est illustrium poetarum qui non aliquid operibus suis stilo remissiore praeluserit*, 8–10). In both Statius and Ausonius, the hastily composed verses are defined against higher poetry and are portrayed as something less than their foil.⁴³

While Ausonius, like Statius before him, refers to fast writing to define his work as minor and occasional, his interests of course transcend literary taxonomy. His is a pose of self-deprecating modesty, in which he once again performs a *captatio benevolentiae* and plays the part of the humble poet. With that *captatio* comes an apology: in saying that he wrote his piece hastily at night, Ausonius acknowledges that the work is not all that it could have been (*hoc ipsi de se probabunt*) and explains why that is so.⁴⁴ Naturally, this is no more to be taken at face value than his self-denigration in the προσωποποιία and elsewhere is. In fact, Ausonius' oath that his iambics were written as quickly as he said they were (*ita te et Hesperium salvos habeam*) indicates that he actually wanted Paulinus to admire how he produced the poem in such a short time span. The oath suggests that Ausonius wished to have Paulinus believe his account of nocturnal writing.⁴⁵ At the same time, its presence points to Ausonius'

while some were produced in a day (*nullum enim ex illis biduo longius tractum, quaedam et in singulis diebus effusa*, 14–15). Ausonius also echoes Statius' preface to Book 1 of the *Silvae*, including the phrase *ipsi de se probent*, in *Ep.* 9a.10–13. See Amherdt 2004, 65, and Pavlovskis 1967, 546–47, who discusses these and other parallels between Ausonius' and Statius' prefaces.

⁴³Was Ausonius writing an epic? This seems very doubtful. Perhaps *heroico metro* just refers to a work in hexameters, without designating an epic. Perhaps, too, Ausonius was referring to an epic, but one that was not actually begun and was even imaginary (in which case *incohatur* would be a fiction). Whatever the historical situation, Ausonius sets his hexameter poem up as a higher text than the iambics he was sending Paulinus. The use of Statius, where epic is the foil to the occasional *Silvae*, then underscores the contrast (while also suggesting that Ausonius did indeed intend to have *heroico metro* stand for an epic poem).

⁴⁴Ker 2004, 210, notes how "the mention of the nocturnal scene [of writing] is sometimes apologetic" and "seeks to explain why the work is not everything it could have been."

⁴⁵Green 1980, 198, recognizes that Ausonius limits his poem to a single *lucubratiuncula* "with an unusually strong oath." The suggestion is that the oath is marked and meant to carry weight. Whether or not Ausonius was really telling the truth about when and how he wrote the poem, even with his oath, is of course impossible to determine and, again, is a secondary matter to how he represents his writing and sought to have Paulinus view it.

supposition that Paulinus might not do so; the oath is needed to convince someone who might be dubious. The understood reason for Paulinus' doubt is that the piece is too accomplished. Although the iambs might look like the product of extended diligence (*diligentia*), of writing and revision over the course of many hours and days, Ausonius assures Paulinus that he dashed them off in a single work night (*lucubratiuncula*). This calls attention to Ausonius' facility as a writer who was able to compose a commendable, if minor, piece with just a little bit of nocturnal work.⁴⁶

More than just entertaining and impressing Paulinus, Ausonius' poem is designed to show him that Ausonius respected and would meet in kind his gestures of outreach, his efforts to connect through the compositions he sent. Instead of offering up a kind of *recusatio* in which he just promises that a work in hexameters is to come, Ausonius keeps the exchange of poetry going. The iambs were valuable as a way of staying in touch and of demonstrating that Ausonius was set upon keeping up his side of things in their correspondence. Literary play operates to bind the two in a "world of erudite interchange," to form a bridge between intellectually and culturally compatible friends.⁴⁷ By asserting that he wrote his piece in nocturnal haste, Ausonius frames matters in a way that, among other things, expresses his commitment to that bond. The paratext is designed to guide Paulinus' reaction so that he recognizes how much Ausonius wanted to communicate frequently with him. This is to show Ausonius' deep dedication to his and Paulinus' *amicitia*, with its duties (and pleasures) of contact and attention, met here in a display of reciprocity.⁴⁸

The iambic poem that Ausonius sent to Paulinus, which survives as part of the letter, confirms Ausonius' concern with maintaining contact. The forty-six-line piece opens with Ausonius commanding his iambs to make their way with all haste to Paulinus, to greet him, and to demand a response (1–18). He then elaborates upon the conceit with typical

Ausonius similarly swears that he wrote a poem quickly in *Ep.* 9a.11–12. There are thus two parallels between the texts, the oath and the echo of Statius (n. 42).

⁴⁶ Paulinus could have seen the account of hasty writing at night as an example of affected modesty while also taking Ausonius at his word. This is what Green 1980, 198, does: "which [Ausonius' statement that he wrote his poem in a *lucubratiuncula*] we may believe, in spite of its usefulness as an excuse and the literary parallel in Statius' preface to Bk. 1 of his *Silvae*."

⁴⁷ I quote Knight 2005, 364. Altman 1982, 186, cited by Knight 2005, 402, notes that letters themselves also constitute bridges between sender and recipient.

⁴⁸ Trout 1999, 57, calls attention to how "reciprocation was fundamental" to Ausonius and Paulinus' relationship.

Ausonius relish, emphasizing how he wants the trip to be fast (19–28), before concluding with a promise that his hexameters are coming (29–43) and with a final order to his iambs to go and come back quickly with another little poem from Paulinus (44–46). Along with reiterating what Ausonius had said in the prose section of the letter, the poem dramatizes an ideal of rapid epistolary exchange. The verses are not only themselves a token of *amicitia* in being a quick response to Paulinus, but they also convey that Ausonius wished to have Paulinus and him continue to sustain their friendship by compressing the time in which they, separated in space, reached out to communicate with letters and poems. Ausonius' wishes would later be challenged, to judge by his letters from 389 onward, in which he complained that the now extreme Christian Paulinus was distancing himself from his old secular contacts and ceasing to nourish *amicitia* through letter writing.⁴⁹ But when he sent his letter with the evening iambs, the exchange of verses that demonstrated and fostered their friendship was still flourishing, with no disturbances in sight. To produce a poem at night in that text was to continue to wear a yoke of friendship made light by concord and to encourage Paulinus to do the same.⁵⁰

Whereas Ausonius used nocturnal writing in the προσωποποιία to portray his poetry as a punishment for the uncommunicative Gregorius, then, he uses it here to show his commitment to communicating with the care and enthusiasm that friendship deserved. The poet gives his work different functions in each case, and he invests the theme of evening composition with characteristics to match. In the process, Ausonius displays the rhetorical adaptability of that theme and of the modesty that it expresses. Ausonius repeats a detail, but is not repetitive when he does so. His nocturnal self is a situational self: it takes on distinct traits and meanings based upon what Ausonius enlists it to do in distinct paratextual settings.

⁴⁹ My comments echo Green 1980, 208.

⁵⁰ The imagery comes from Ausonius, *Ep.* 23.1–3 = *Ep.* 24.1–3 (with *nota* in 24.1 for *certa* in 23.1 and *venerabile* in 24.2 for *tolerabile* in 23.2): *discutimus, Pauline, iugum, quod certa fovebat / temperies, leve quod positu et tolerabile iunctis / tractabat paribus concordia mitis habenis* (“We are shaking off the yoke that a fixed temperateness used to make easy, that, light in its placement and bearable to those it joined, soft concord used to guide with equal reins”). Whether *Ep.* 23 and 24 are separate poems remains contested; see Knight 2005, 364–65.

III

Another person with whom Ausonius shared literary interests and tastes, the rhetor Axius Paulus, is the recipient of a third poem that Ausonius claimed to have worked on at night. Paulus and Ausonius were close friends who enjoyed “a happy meeting of minds,”⁵¹ as Ausonius’ comfortable tone in his letters to Paulus (*Ep.* 2–8) and their similar enthusiasm for poetry demonstrate. One of the things each liked to do was to share his light and playful compositions with the other, whether in person or by letter. The texts include Paulus’ *Delirus*, which Ausonius describes as “slight in theme but not in finish,”⁵² as well as Ausonius’ mock-didactic poem on oysters (*Ep.* 3) and his macaronic verses in Greek and Latin (*Ep.* 6).

Ausonius also dedicated another playful poem to Paulus, the *Cento Nuptialis*.⁵³ One of the sixteen Vergilian centos to survive from Latin antiquity, the *Cento Nuptialis* is comprised of discrete lines or segments of lines that Ausonius took from Vergil’s *Eclogues*, *Georgics*, and *Aeneid* and pieced together to create a new narrative poem.⁵⁴ The cento describes a wedding, presumably the future emperor Gratian’s (ca. 374), in lofty strains up to line 79.⁵⁵ (Ausonius had been called to the imperial court

⁵¹ Green 1980, 201. On Ausonius and Axius Paulus, see also Pastorino 1971, 46–47, and Knight 2006, 369–85.

⁵² *Ep.* 5a.14. I quote from the translation of Evelyn-White 1919–21, 2:21.

⁵³ Ausonius emphasizes as well that the *Bissula*, dedicated to Paulus, is a playful poem (*Bis. praef.* 7, *carm.* 1.2–3, 2).

⁵⁴ Twelve of the centos are on secular and mythological subjects, while four have Christian content. On the former set of poems, see McGill 2005, and on the latter, Bažil 2009 and Sandnes 2011, 141–80 (on the *Cento Probae*).

⁵⁵ At the end of the dedicatory epistle to Paulus, Ausonius asserts that he served under his commander (*sub imperatore tum merui*, 58–59) when he wrote the cento before using military language when dealing with how Paulus is to respond to the piece. This need not mean that Ausonius wrote the cento when on campaign with Valentinian in 368–69. Ausonius uses the metaphor of military service in a letter to Symmachus to describe service at court (Symm. *Ep.* 1.32.4 = *Ep.* 12 Green). As Salzman and Roberts 2011, 77, note, the metaphor “is appropriate because the Latin word for service at court was the same as for military service, *militia*.” A similar metaphor is likely at play here. Supporting this view is the way that the phrase *sub imperatore tum merui* picks up on Ausonius’ statement earlier in the letter that the *imperator Valentinianus* ordered him to write his poem (10–16, with *iussus erat* in line 10). Ausonius would appear at the end of the letter to underline how he was under orders at court to compose the cento and, thus, was metaphorically under Valentinian’s command. Ausonius’ use of the word *iubere* in the later passage (*iubebis*, 60) might have been meant to tighten the connection between the passages all the more, even though Paulus is the subject of that particular verb. This reading allows for the date of ca.

in the mid-360s to tutor Gratian.) At that point, the couple enters their bedchamber (80–100). After a prose *parecbasis*, or digression, in which Ausonius relates that he will now proceed with Fescennine license, the poet produces a frankly pornographic account of their first matrimonial sex (101–31)—no small feat, considering that the language is all Vergil's. He then concludes with an apology in prose for that racy material.

In a dedicatory epistle to Paulus that precedes the cento, Ausonius takes a familiar rhetorical tack and disparages his text. To open the epistle, Ausonius calls the poem “a frivolous and worthless little piece” (*frivolum et nullius pretii opusculum*, 1–2) that he hurriedly put together without lending it sharpness and wit.⁵⁶ He then claims that the cento is the sort of work that “you can laugh at more than praise” (*quod ridere magis quam laudare possis*, 5–6) and that deserves no notice, before growing still more abject and asserting that it filled him with displeasure to degrade the dignity of Vergil's poetry with such laughable material (*piget equidem Vergiliani carminis dignitatem tam ioculari dehonestasse materia*, 8–9).⁵⁷

As I have noted was common in Ausonius, the modesty of the *capatio benevolentiae* is here so extreme as to imply irony and, thus, the message that the poem is not at all as bad as Ausonius said it is. At the same time, the poet is able to advertise the qualities for which he is expressing regret. Ausonius frames the cento as a parody that degrades Vergil, as a text that recasts dignity (*dignitas*) with the laughable (*iocularis*).⁵⁸ In the process, he throws the spotlight on the entertainment value of his work,

374 and the connection to Gratian's wedding. On that historical backdrop for the cento, see also Green 1991, 518; McGill 2005, 92–93.

⁵⁶ *Perlege hoc etiam, si operae est, frivolum et nullius pretii opusculum, quod nec labor excudit nec cura limavit, sine ingenii acumine et morae maturitate* (“If one can spare the effort, read through this frivolous and worthless little work, which neither labor forged nor care polished, a work without intellectual spark or the ripeness that time brings,” 1–3).

⁵⁷ *Centonem vocant qui primi hac concinnatione luserunt. solae memoriae negotium sparsa colligere et integrare lacerata, quod ridere magis quam laudare possis. . . . piget equidem Vergiliani carminis dignitatem tam ioculari dehonestasse materia* (“They who first played at this mode of compilation called it a cento. It is a task for memory alone to gather together scattered verses and to form the mangled lines into a whole—the kind of thing that you could ridicule more than praise. . . . Indeed, it displeases me to dishonor the dignity of Vergil with such laughable material,” 3–9).

⁵⁸ The concluding account of the *imminutio* is a clear instance of parody, in that it comically degrades its source material. But Ausonius casts the entire poem as one that lowers Vergil, which is to make it parodic in character. The term “parody” might be applied to all centos, irrespective of whether they lower their source material for comic effect, based on how they fit the model's language to a new context and purposes (cf. Quintilian *Inst.* 9.2.35 on parody). Critics, however, have developed taxonomies of the centos that include but are not limited to parody; see Glei 2006, 291–94, with a review of other work.

which resides in the very things that shame the self-denigrating centonist: the minor, ludic character of the poem and the way Ausonius creates something light and parodic from something grand and canonical. While the addressee in all of this is Paulus, he stands in for an ideal reader who will disapprove of how Ausonius treats Vergil and will appreciate his protestations of modest regret. When appealing to him, Ausonius brings to the fore the textual features that stoke his supposititious displeasure. The ideal reader is very apparent later in the dedicatory epistle, when Ausonius states that he did not withhold even a ridiculous composition from Paulus' severity (*severitas*) because of how much he trusted in his dedicatee's kindness and affection (*tanta mihi candoris tui et amoris fiducia est ut severitati tuae nec ridenda subtraherem*, 23–24). Given the other poems that Paulus and Ausonius shared, it is evident that Paulus was anything but severe in his literary tastes. By so mischaracterizing his friend, Ausonius is able to amuse him with the irony and to acknowledge the warmth and intimacy that he actually felt from him. Yet Ausonius also casts Paulus as his stern ideal reader and makes him the rhetorical foil through which he advertises the element of parodic play in his cento by setting it up as an object of Paulus' disapproval.

Ausonius proceeds in his dedicatory epistle to explain that the emperor Valentinian had compelled him to compose his text and to enter it into an informal literary contest at court with Valentinian's own cento on the same theme.⁵⁹ In that text, Ausonius relates, the emperor had shown some skill, connecting verses aptly and to humorous effect (*aptis equidem versibus et compositione festiva*, 13–14). It seems safe to suppose that Ausonius would not have fabricated the historical context for composition, and that he referred to those circumstances in part to display his lofty social position in the age of Valentinian, while also shaping the account to reproduce the conventional modesty theme of writing by command.⁶⁰ According to the poet, the situation was a delicate one;

⁵⁹ *Sed quid facerem? iussum erat, quodque est potentissimum imperandi genus, rogabat qui iubere poterat. imperator Valentinianus, vir meo iudicio eruditus, nuptias quondam eiusmodi ludo descripserat, aptis equidem versibus et compositione festiva. experiri deinde volens quantum nostra contentione praecelleret, simile nos de eodem concinnare praecepit* ("But what could I do? It was written by command, and at the request—which is the most powerful kind of order—of a man who was able to command, the emperor Valentinian, a man learned in my judgment. He had at one time described a wedding in a game of this kind, connecting verses aptly and to humorous effect. Then, wanting to test how much he outdid my piece in a competition, he enjoined me to put together something similar on the same topic," 10–16).

⁶⁰ Sivan 1992, 98, notes that Ausonius' account of the origins of his cento allowed him to "name-drop in a 'humble' and socially accepted manner" and to illustrate his own position. Curtius 1953, 85, gives a useful overview of the modesty *topos* of writing by command.

he could not throw the contest, because the loss would look like clumsy flattery, but could not compete too fiercely and win, because that would be insolent. The solution he devised, he says, was to enter the competition with feigned reluctance. This enabled him to appear obedient and to defeat Valentinian without offending him.⁶¹

Despite stating that he had been the victor in the literary contest, Ausonius proceeds to disparage his cento again when he tells Paulus how he came to send the work to him (21–24):

Hoc tum die uno et addita lucubratione properatum modo inter liturarios
meos cum repperissem, tanta mihi candoris tui et amoris fiducia est ut
severitati tuae nec ridenda subtraherem.

When I lately found this work, hastily written then in a day with some evening revision added, among my drafts, such was my trust in your kindness and your affection that I did not even withhold a ridiculous composition from your severity.

When describing how he completed his text, Ausonius recalls the opening of the epistle and reiterates its message that the cento, having been written in haste, was a deficient work. This was the case even though Ausonius worked on the poem at night. *Lucubratio* was among Latin authors “very often associated with the finishing or polishing of a task or a text.”⁶² But by stating that he was able to devote a small amount of time, including just a bit of *lucubratio*, to the cento (*hoc . . . properatum*), Ausonius makes it understood that the poem was very much an occasional piece, as well as that it was inadequately finished and lacked the quality that extended attention could give it. Nocturnal authorship is here a matter of speedily completing a text, as it was in the letter to Paulinus. Now, however, the poem does not connect separated friends. Instead, it is written for delivery at a court performance, whose deadline Ausonius tacitly cites as the reason he had to write too quickly to produce something better.⁶³

⁶¹ *Quam scrupulosum hoc mihi fuerit intellege. neque anteferri volebam neque posthaberi, cum aliorum quoque iudicio detegenda esset adulatio inepta, si cederem, insolentia, si ut aemulus emerem. suscepi igitur similis recusanti feliciterque et obnoxius gratiam tenui nec victor offendi* (“Understand how delicate this was for me. I wanted neither to be preferred nor to be considered inferior, since the clumsy flattery, should I give place to him, was sure to be exposed to the judgment of others, as would my arrogance, if I should surpass him as a rival. Therefore, I took up the task like someone refusing it and, happily, I retained favor in my subservience and, being the victor, did not offend,” 16–21).

⁶² Ker 2004, 228.

⁶³ The strong implication of *die uno et addita lucubratione* is that Ausonius followed up his work during one day with work during one night, and only during one night. It then

It was because of the cento's deficiencies, Ausonius then implies, that it languished among his drafts. Whether or not Ausonius actually had the cento tucked away and later sent it to Paulus, the poet puts that account to rhetorical ends, as it denigrates the cento all the more. The understood message is that one found among the rough drafts (*liturarii*) flawed texts like the cento that really should not be seen, and that the collection of drafts was a place of obscurity for justifiably unknown works.⁶⁴

By characterizing his cento as the kind of work that he wrote and then forgot, thus consigning it to what had been due oblivion, Ausonius further extends his *captatio*. The humility is still redolent of irony, which the preceding reference to how he had defeated Valentinian only intensifies. What happened in the competition at court in fact provides a model for how to respond to the cento. The implication is that the imperial audience had already recognized just how fine a cento competitor Ausonius was, and that Paulus and the general reader should follow suit instead of taking their cues from his humility. Ausonius' awareness of the general reader is evident in his parecbasis, when he addresses his audience in the plural (*vos, si placet, hic iam legendi modum ponite; cetera curiosis relinquite*, "If you like, put an end to your reading here, and leave the rest to the curious," 7–8). So, too, in his concluding apology for his pornographic scene, Ausonius asks Paulus to protect him from hypocritical moralists who might judge him personally upon reading the sexual material, and he makes other comments about readers at large.⁶⁵ Obviously, Ausonius would have assumed the same double audience for the dedicatory epistle

stands to reason that Ausonius had only that amount of time to work on his cento because, on the day after he wrote, he was to engage in the court competition with Valentinian.

⁶⁴ Ausonius also claims to find the *Griphus* and the *Bissula* among his drafts, in both cases as a means of disparaging them. Sidonius Apollinaris similarly denigrates "trifles" (*nugae*) he had written by describing them as hidden away in a writing case and nibbled at by mice (*Ep.* 9.13.6). Pavlovskis 1967, 551, discusses Ausonius' statement that he found the cento among his drafts as well as the theme of haste in the preface, in both cases differently from how I do.

⁶⁵ *Sed cum legeris, adesto mihi adversum eos, qui, ut Iuvenalis ait, "Curios simulant et Bacchanalia vivunt"* ("But when you read it, be at my side against those who, as Juvenal says, 'Play the part of Curius and live like Bacchanals,'" 1–2). Ausonius also refers to readers in the plural (*meminerint*, 4) when introducing examples of other authors who, upright themselves, had written sexual material. Finally, he comments that "certain men" (*aliquorum hominum*, 21) who, in their put-on severity, might condemn his piece should know that the poem was taken from Vergil (20–22), before concluding with an injunction to the general disapproving reader not to read the cento; to forget it when he has read it; or, if he does not forget it, to excuse the poem (22–24).

and, therefore, would have been aiming to have his irony work on more than just Paulus himself.⁶⁶

It is possible that Ausonius was continuing to allude to the actual circumstances of composition when claiming that he wrote so quickly, just as he did in his remarks on the court setting for the poem—i.e., that he really had to write in haste in order to have a poem ready to compete with Valentinian's. At the very least, it seems clear that he wished to have Paulus and the general reader consider those remarks to be as historical as those on his literary contest with the emperor, while he also used the details to guide the reception of the poem. As part of the latter process, the reference to the speed with which Ausonius composed his piece creates a picture of a centonist who was able to play his literary game *in toto* with easy adroitness. The indication is of an author who wanted his audience to appreciate how readily he had been able to meet the demands of cento composition, to be impressed by the facility with which he had produced his winning effort. Ausonius' wishes are to be distinguished from those he demonstrates in the letter to Paulinus, even though in both texts he aims to have readers appreciate how accomplished his quickly written poetry is. What he seeks is for his readers to be impressed by merits he displays that are peculiar to the cento—not only his ability to remake Vergil's language in a parodic manner, but also his ability to do so with considerable haste, in only a day and a night.⁶⁷

Ausonius' concern with getting his readership to respond in that positive fashion helps to explain why, later in the epistle, he spells out at considerable length what a cento was and how one put together verse segments to produce it. That passage works to ensure that Paulus and anyone else who encountered the poem would be informed readers who could understand what Ausonius had to do to produce his text and who could assess his efforts.⁶⁸ To close the prefatory epistle, Ausonius in fact

⁶⁶The construction of the implied reader, moreover, would seem to assume a wider audience—i.e., to presuppose the possibility that the cento could encounter as it circulated broadly the kind of severe reader that Ausonius creates.

⁶⁷Perhaps Ausonius also meant for *lucubratio* to take on a deeper resonance once readers had come to the obscene ending; amusement would come from comparing what the poet had stayed up doing with what the couple had stayed up doing.

⁶⁸This interpretation builds upon McGill 2005, 3–4. Of course, Ausonius was also simply enabling any and all of his readers to understand cento composition as such, over and above recognizing and judging how he had gone about it. Sivan 1992, 97, asserts that Ausonius' exposition "seem[s] quite superfluous as far as Paulus, himself a poet, was concerned." Being a poet, however, does not necessarily mean knowing about the cento form, or at least knowing all that much about it.

directs his audience to gauge his achievement when he states that Paulus, with the knowledge about the text that Ausonius had given him, would be able to judge the work he had created.⁶⁹ The *captatio*-tinged remark there that Paulus might find the cento lacking has the same aroma of insincerity as the rest of his self-effacing modesty does. What Ausonius wants is to have his addressee and his other readers view him as the victor over the able Valentinian that he had depicted himself to be. This involves seeing how much knowledge of Vergil was necessary for Ausonius to centonize⁷⁰ but also how the poet had managed to negotiate quickly and, thus, adeptly the rules that he had laid out in his exposition of cento writing.

As a court figure engaged in a literary competition with the emperor, the Ausonius who devoted just a small amount of *lucubratio* to centonizing Vergil is of course a different nocturnal author from the one found elsewhere in his work. Ausonius was a remarkably versatile poet who produced an extremely wide range of compositions across several genres while also composing different kinds of verbally ludic poetry. But flexibility and variation are also hallmarks of his statements on his work. However often Ausonius turned to affected modesty when discussing what he had written, he also adapted his remarks to particular texts and addressees in order to meet particular rhetorical goals. The comments on nocturnal writing demonstrate that characteristic drive for diversity. In the process, they provide examples of the variety with which Ausonius portrayed his authorial self and his poetry, created conditions for the evaluation of his work, and utilized what he wrote to connect with others in his social world.⁷¹ To explore these dimensions of Ausonian modesty is to find substance in what past criticism dismissed as barren mannerism.

⁶⁹ *Quae si omnia ita tibi videbuntur, ut praeceptum est, dices me composuisse centonem et, quia sub imperatore tum merui, procedere mihi inter frequentes stipendium iubebis; sin aliter, aere dirutum facies, ut cumulo carminis in fiscum suum redacto redeant versus, unde venerunt. vale* ("If you find everything done in accordance with what I have laid out, you will say that I have written a cento and, since I served at that time under my commander, you will direct 'that pay be issued to me as for regular service'; but if [you find] otherwise, you will sentence me 'to forfeit pay,' so that this 'lump sum' of verse may be 'returned to its proper pay-chest,' and the verses go back to the source from which they came. Farewell," 57–62). The translation from "you will direct" is from Evelyn-White 1919–21, 1:377. (The quotation marks in the translation designate for Evelyn-White the military terminology that Ausonius was adapting.)

⁷⁰ Ancient centonists appear to have worked predominantly, if not entirely, from memory. See Ausonius' comment in his dedicatory epistle that cento writing is "a task for memory alone" (*solae memoriae negotium*, 4–5) and McGill 2005, 10–18.

⁷¹ I echo Ker 2004, 212, on how the image of the nocturnal writer can "condition the reception of text by audience."

As scholarship continues to discover with paratexts generally,⁷² there is often more than meets the eye when an ancient author writes about his work, and there are often insights to be had about the writer, his text and its purposes, his efforts to shape its reception, and his literary culture when we pay close attention to what he has to say.

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⁷²Significant recent work on paratextuality includes a conference on the topic held at St. Andrews in 2011, which is the basis of a volume in preparation for Cambridge University Press at the time of this writing, and Baraz 2012.

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