

## ***Quaelibet Audendi: Fortunatus and the Acrostic\****

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It is not widely known that Venantius Fortunatus, the sixth-century poet and later bishop of Poitiers, experimented for a time with the *carmen figuratum* or figure-poem. His efforts, one of which was never completed, are preserved for us as *Carmina* 2.4, 2.5, and 5.6. The most eye-catching, though not the most lyrical, of Fortunatus' works, these three poems are rectilinear acrostics, composed according to a rigid scheme in which the number of letters in each hexameter is predetermined to equal the total number of verses, while certain letters, always including the first and last letters in each line, spell out additional verses downward or diagonally.<sup>1</sup> These "interwoven lines" or *versus intexti*, marked red or green in the manuscripts, are what constitute the figure: in Poem 5.6 a boxed 'X,' in 2.5 a diamond, and in 2.4 a cross with angled terminations [see Figures at end]. Moreover, each of the *versus intexti* also scans as a hexameter, so that the completed acrostic generates within itself a second, smaller hexameter poem.

The form, though unusual, is not without precedent. Hellenistic poets occasionally exploited variations in line-length to create shape-poems: an egg, wings, a double axe, an altar (*AP* 15.21-2, 24-7). One of these, the "Altar" of Dosiadas (*AP* 15.26) also incorporates an acrostic verse. Very elaborate figured acrostics were created in the fourth century by Porphyrius Optatianus, whose virtuoso productions are likely to have been seen by Fortunatus.<sup>2</sup> But although Fortunatus is probably somewhat disingenuous in his claim to have created the rectilinear acrostic "without the guidance of any similar model"

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<sup>1</sup>The term "figure-poem" or "shape-poem" denotes any *technopaegnon* in which letter-counting is employed for visual effect. To designate figure-poems which incorporate *versus intexti*, I have used the term "figured acrostic," even where these verses are found not in the *acrostic* position, i.e., the left side of the text, but in other positions as well (technically *mesostich*, *telostich*, *parastich*). See the anthology of figure-poems by Simonini and Gualdoni 11-20. For the manuscript coloring, see Leo 30, 32, 116.

<sup>2</sup>The close formal resemblance between Fortunatus' figured acrostics and certain of Optatian's works (notably *Carm.* 18) makes complete independence unlikely. See the valuable discussion by Schaller 23-25; also Raby 45.

(*Carm.* 5.6a.11), his exceptional sensitivity to the possibilities and challenges of the form lends his work a particular interest. For the figure-poem opens its own peculiar vista on the nature of poetic language, whether we regard it as a meditation on the magical potential of word and image, as an investigation of the mathematical possibilities of linguistic patterning, or—the approach taken in this essay—as a rhetorical instrument of an unusual but effective kind.<sup>3</sup>

Fortunatus' claim to special attention amid the many examples of figured composition rests, above all, on a prose epistle which he wrote to accompany his acrostic 5.6. Addressing one Syagrius, bishop of Autun,<sup>4</sup> the poet explains what is remarkable about his composition and describes how the project was conceived and carried out. He also restates the acrostic's practical petition, that Syagrius, to whom the work is dedicated, should provide financial assistance to a third party and accept the poem itself as compensation. The circumstances and the persons involved are almost entirely obscure, and yet the document itself is of considerable interest. In it, we have an opportunity, perhaps unique in literary studies, to study the *carmen figuratum* from the perspective of the poet himself. Comparison of the letter with the acrostic shows Fortunatus to have been aware of some of the same aspects of figured composition that have intrigued modern readers; it also offers an interesting insight into the relation between figure-poems and literary patronage. A complete translation of the epistle 5.6a will be found in the appendix.

Literary historians will be particularly interested in a passage from §7 of the letter, in which Fortunatus claims to derive justification for his new poetical venture from a line of Horace. After quoting *Ars Poetica* 9-10: *pictoribus atque poetis / quaelibet audendi semper fuit aequa potestas* ("Painters and poets have always had equal power to venture on whatever they choose"),<sup>5</sup> he proceeds to reflect on the comparison between poets and painters in light of the more famous Horatian tag *ut pictura poesis* ("Poetry is as painting," *Ars* 361). The prestige of the allusion would not be lost on Syagrius, who like other

<sup>3</sup>For alternative approaches see esp. Deonna 192-93, Levitan 250-53.

<sup>4</sup>Little is known of this Syagrius except that he bears a Gallo-Roman name (he was no doubt a relative of the Syagrius who was bishop of Autun in the time of Sidonius Apollinaris (Sid. Ap. *Ep.* 8.8)) and that he enjoyed the patronage of Sigebert and Brunhilde (Greg. Tur. *Ep.* 9.222, *H.F.* 9.23). For full references, see Krusch's index 121.

<sup>5</sup>Citations of Fortunatus follow the text of Leo; translations are my own throughout. The fact that Fortunatus gives the plural *quaelibet*, rather than the singular *quidlibet* found in the manuscript tradition of Horace, is probably not significant, since he claims to be quoting from memory. The variant does not affect the translation.

Gallo-Roman bishops of the period will have been eager to capitalize on his cultural heritage.<sup>6</sup> The use Fortunatus makes of it, however, is curious indeed:

considerans versiculum, si quae vult artifex permiscet uterque, cur non,  
etsi non ab artifice, misceantur utraque, ut ordiretur una tela simul poesis  
et pictura?

Thinking over this line, I asked myself, "If either artist can mix up whatever he wishes, why should not both things be mixed together, even if not by an artist, so that poetry and painting would be woven at the same time and in a single web?"

The scheme is audacious and somewhat perverse—as if Fortunatus actually believed himself to be following a recommendation from the very summit of ancient literary theory when he set about arranging letters in a square: *ut pictura poesis erit*.<sup>7</sup> Yet the tone of his remark is light. Fortunatus has already described his state of mind as “sluggish,” and here the self-deprecatory parenthesis “even if not by an artist” introduces a note of irony into the discussion. The effect is to draw our attention away from the planned work of art and focus it on the planner himself, with emphasis falling on the repeated *artifex*. The word means “artificer” quite generally, and not only “artist” in our sense: Jerome uses it even for carpenters and masons (*LS* s.v. *artifex* 1a.1). By modestly refusing title to it, however, Fortunatus appears to restrict its use to practitioners of the fine arts; in poetry this would mean writers of odes in the grand style (“Pindaric Horace”). The modesty is affected, of course (cf. Curtius 83-84): the poet will return to the term *artifex* later in the epistle, exploiting its ambiguity with a cleverness Syagrius is expected to appreciate. In the meantime, the strangeness of the acrostic project will provide Fortunatus with an opportunity to construct a new significance for the role of *artifex* within a particular patronal context. As we shall see, it is to be a role defined less by abstract notions of art than by the tensions inherent in figured composition, tensions between artifice and expression, between freedom and constraint, between private emotion and public responsibility.

<sup>6</sup>George 16-18. Manitius points out that *Carm.* 5.6a.7 is Fortunatus’ only explicit citation from classical poetry (178), a fact which provides perhaps our best insight into the character of the unknown Syagrius.

<sup>7</sup>See Hagstrum for this mispunctuation of *Ars* 361 as a critical dogma in place of a simple comparison, attested from the fifth century (59-60).

Before turning to Fortunatus' own remarks on the acrostic, it will be helpful to make a few general observations about this species of composition. From a modern perspective, its disadvantages as an artistic medium are all too obvious: such artificial requirements of form can hardly enhance that grace and economy of expression we consider indispensable in good poetry.<sup>8</sup> And yet many will find that the figure-poem has an appeal which goes beyond its interest as a literary curiosity. One does not have to spend much time browsing in Optatian's bizarre but marvelous collection—poems in the shape of a Panpipe, an organ, an altar; poems that read backward and inside out; *versus intexti* weaving designs and even pictures of dazzling complexity—to feel that such poetry has standards of its own which depart from and at times contradict those to which we are accustomed. Levitan, in his study of Optatian, describes the figured acrostic as “a literary phenomenon of a special kind, a voiceless text, a static construction or simultaneous design” (263). Such a poem, he argues, can hardly be recited aloud: it has yielded up the aural, the durational, and to some extent even the semantic properties of language in exchange for a new aesthetic of visual and mathematical patterning. In the case of the acrostic, even the basic components of poetry must be redefined.

So long as a poem is considered a sonic artifact with duration in time, grounded in the human voice, its basic constituent remains the intoned phrase, numberless in variety as vocal gestures are numberless. When, however, it becomes a visual artifact with extension in space, it is capable of a much more radical analysis . . . . The elementary particle becomes the individual letter, one of only “a couple-dozen squiggles,” as John Barth has called them (254).

On this analysis, the essence of the acrostic is its reducibility: what the poem actually says recedes in importance before the fascination of seeing a text dissolve and then reconstitute itself as a kind of literary mosaic, a surface bounded and decorated by language.

Still, one should not underestimate the effectiveness of the figure-poem as a rhetorical instrument. Optatian's poems seem to have been successful in persuading the Emperor Constantine to recall him from exile.<sup>9</sup> Fortunatus, too, writes with a specific end in view, certainly in the case of his acrostic 5.6, and probably in the others as well: the choice of a cruciform design is quite sug-

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<sup>8</sup>Schanz is openly hostile to Optatian: “Verwunderlich ist es nur, dass ein Mann so unendlichen Fleiss auf solche Abgeschmacktheiten und Nichtigkeiten verwenden wollte” (13).

<sup>9</sup>So Barnes 184; Barnes warns, however, that most details of Optatian's life are known only by conjecture.

gestive in the context of Radegund's negotiations to obtain a relic of the True Cross for her abbey at Poitiers.<sup>10</sup> Not that these purposes are served by any skillful argumentation or striking phraseology in the poems themselves. The content of a figure-poem is generally unremarkable, its expression bland and a bit awkward:

Dius apex, Adam ut fecit, dat somnia donec,  
avulsa costa, plasmata est Eva, nec impar ...

The divine Summit, when he made Adam, granted him dreams until  
Eve was formed from his extracted rib, nor was she unequal.  
(Ven. Fort., *Carm.* 5.6.1-2)

The impact of such lines depends far less on their content than it does on the mere fact of their being what they are: complete and acceptable lines of verse. For the figure cannot be said to succeed unless the lines of which it is composed achieve a certain standard. Letters must at least form words; phrases must at least be grammatical; verses must scan and thoughts must be coherent to some degree. The one attempt that has been made to reproduce Fortunatus' acrostics in English falls short in this respect: while representing the form of the original satisfactorily enough, the translator cannot meet the challenge of syntactical coherence, but is forced to fill out the grid with more or less random expressions (Cook 47). By contrast, the Latin figure-poems that we have can all be conned, although not without difficulty in some cases. Mere coherence becomes in the acrostic a triumph of ingenuity. It is as though the poet has won the game he set for himself. Yet the game is a serious one, in that the overcoming of obstacles in the production of these verses seems itself to establish a certain claim on behalf of the prayer, petition, or compliment the verses convey. It is the success of the figure that guarantees the effectiveness of the appeal. Hence it is quite usual to spell out the occasion and the name of the recipient right in the *versus intexti*, where the message takes on additional status as the solution to a series of figural problems.

There does not seem to be any limit on the intricacy of design which can be effective rhetorically. In fact, the rhetoric of this poetry is of a piece with

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<sup>10</sup>"She had Sigebert's support in this venture, and, like the king, was alive to the persuasive power Fortunatus' poetry could lend to her endeavours. In Radegund's name, the poet addressed three eloquent poems to plead her cause in Byzantium" (George 30). It is not unlikely that 2.4 and 2.5, both of which incorporate prayers on the Cross and one of which honors Radegund and Agnes by name, were also connected with this episode in some way.

the difficulty of the figure selected and the degree of constraint it imposes on the poet's diction. For the tribute paid to the recipient derives in large part from those very marks of toilsome effort which show the poet to have been inhibited from the most natural and graceful expression of his theme. This is not poetry which is meant to appear effortless. The intention is rather to demonstrate the lengths to which the poet will go to attain his rhetorical end. The merits of even a somewhat forced and artificial idiom can be demonstrated from the opening of Optatian's *Carmen* 22.<sup>11</sup> It is a poem which is best introduced by describing its design: a rectilinear acrostic of thirty-seven letters on a side, crisscrossed by a trellis-like pattern of no fewer than fourteen *versus intexti* in four different meters. The opening lines show the strain of maintaining such a figure:

Mirum opus est cunctos et tales edere versus  
 sicque locare hederis. Paulum tu, die, rogatus  
 mox ades. En quorsum rapies, qui praebeo fixas?

It is an amazing work to produce all the verses and of such a kind,  
 and to arrange them thus [like a trellis?] for vines. Briefly invoked,  
 o Day, be soon present. Lo, whither will you take [me], who offer  
 them fixed?

Contorted and elliptical, the lines are scarcely possible Latin, let alone graceful poetry. Yet such as they are they convey the poet's pride in his achievement and a sense of the value of the offering. The work is a *mirum opus*, intended to dazzle as much as to please the sensibilities. Levitan's response is, I believe, exactly the one the poet expects:

With the possible exception of Sisyphus, antiquity has no more compelling paradigm of expended effort than the poet Optatian moving his own stones to and fro in these unprecedented mosaics. . . . As impressive as the poems are as finished products, they are irresistibly more impressive as activities. How much time, how much intellectual labor, how many discarded versions, how much paper, how much ink has been so conspicuously consumed for this gigantic enterprise (266)?

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<sup>11</sup>See the illustration of the completed figure in *TAPA* 115, 259. Polara discusses the authorship of this poem and addresses difficulties of translation (140-42). Its obscurity of style and occasional technical failings are perhaps unworthy of Optatian; however, they might equally well be explained by the unusual difficulty of the figure.

The conspicuous consumption of effort which so impresses Levitan may be of great value to the poet who must deal with the realities of patronage. A wealthy or powerful acquaintance may be insensitive to the beauties of conventional poetry and yet be responsive to some remarkable display of industrious devotion. The composer of a figured acrostic has made such a display. Instead of an occasional poem, he has produced a poem which is itself an occasion, one which forcibly declares the circumstances of its own creation and the exceptional toil and ingenuity of its creator.

It goes without saying that some portion of the figure-poem's rhetorical effectiveness derives solely from its pictorial quality. The visual element serves at the very least to draw attention to the poem; in some cases, it also reinforces the chosen theme with an appropriate emblem or symbol. Optatian's *Carmen* 9, for instance, honors its recipient with the figure of a palm, while his *Carmina* 14 and 19 both incorporate the chi-rho monogram into the figure as an indication of his piety. Similarly, the crossed lines of Fortunatus' acrostic 5.6 [see Figure 2] are meant to resemble a snare, representating the theme of release from captivity. Less obvious, but more significant in the patronal context, is the difference the pictorial element makes in the value of the work as a presentation piece. The appeal of figure-poems and acrostics as objects is celebrated in the practice of having them inscribed on walls, a natural step to take and one which Fortunatus goes so far as to recommend to his patron Syagrius (Tardi 153-54, George 17 n. 82). Even if not inscribed, however, the physicality of such a text—its way of presenting phonetic signs "fixed" in place like tiles in a mosaic—endows it with a kind of concrete or extrinsic worth, which in turn enhances the merit of the acrostic-maker as giver.

Fortunatus makes a bold claim for the extrinsic value of the figure-poem in the dedication of his acrostic 5.6. The occasion of the poem, as we learn from the presentation letter, is a request to Syagrius that he pay the money to ransom certain prisoners. The horizontal text spells out an *exemplum* of universal significance: God's generosity in redeeming human nature from sin. The five descending verses read as follows:

Da Fortunato sacer haec pia vota Syagri.  
 Dulce Dei munus, quo merx te, care, coronet:  
 Captivos laxans, Domini meditatio fies.  
 Cara Deo pietas animam dat de nece solvi.  
 Cristus se misit, cum nos a morte revexit.

Blessed Syagrius, grant Fortunatus this devoted prayer.  
 Sweet is God's gift; may the wealth thereof crown you, dear one.  
 In freeing the captives, you will become a figuration of our Lord.  
 Devotion, dear to God, grants the soul to be released from death.  
 Christ gave himself when he brought us back from death.

Above the poem itself one further verse is added as a *titulus*, "Augustidunensis opus tibi solvo, Syagri" ("I pay this work to you, Syagrius of Autun").

In these verses there is word-play on the Latin verb *solvere* 'release.' Syagrius' action in ransoming (*laxans*) the captives is equated typologically with Christ's releasing (*solvi*) the soul from damnation. That the ransom will involve an expenditure of money is tactfully implied in the use of monetary terms (*munus, merx, cara*) to describe God's generosity. *Solvi*, in the fifth line quoted, also fits into this pattern, for in addition to its basic meaning 'to loosen, release,' it is frequently used in the sense of 'to pay (a debt)' (*LS* 1727 s.v. *solvo* 2b.3a). Syagrius is being asked to "release" the captives by his willingness to "pay" their ransom. Correspondingly, when Fortunatus uses *solvo* in the *titulus* to refer to his own act of dedication, he implies that in the acrostic he is offering Syagrius something of monetary value, "paying" for the favor he requests. At the same time, he gestures toward his achievement in "releasing" or "solving" the tangled problem of the work itself. It is a subtle point, perhaps, and yet by exploiting this double meaning of the Latin verb, Fortunatus argues by implication for the value of his offering. The effort expended in composition has given the poet something to set in the balance against his patron's expenditure of money.

Let us now turn to the presentation letter. It is a remarkable piece in its own right, a fine example of Fortunatus' highly-wrought prose style, with its attention to rhythm (Memoli 16, 93-96), its extensive use of unusual words and coinages (Blomgren 23-26), and its careful deployment of tropes such as anaphora and isocolon. Still more impressive is the skill with which the writer's personal experience, a visit from the father of one of the imprisoned townspeople, is turned into a series of general reflections calculated to produce a particular emotional effect. In the elaborate opening clauses, for instance, autobiographical detail is introduced only as will prepare the scene for the coming narrative, while dramatizing the effects of idleness on the creative faculty.

Torpore vecordis otii, quo mens ebria desipit diutina tabe morbescente  
 brutiscens, et velut ignavi soporis hebetante marcore suffectus, negotii



indulti nulla mordente cura dormitans, cum videretur scilicet tam lectio  
neglegi quam usus abuti, neque nancisceretur quicquam occasionis ex  
themate quod digereretur in poesi . . .

In the torpor of witless idleness, in which the drunken mind babbles,  
growing brutish with a long decay turning to disease, I was overcome as  
by the weary faintness of lazy sleep, and drowsed untroubled by any  
biting care for my favored occupation. It seemed in fact that all my  
reading went unread, my talent untapped, nor did I find in my  
circumstances any theme which might be treated in poetry . . .

Here we learn that the poet has been drinking, feels drowsy, and has not composed for some time. Even these fairly reliable points, however, are developed primarily for rhetorical purposes. It may be true that Fortunatus sometimes wrote poetry while inebriated; at least he makes the same statement in his prefatory epistle to Gregory (*Praefatio* §4). But the same detail that serves in the latter epistle to emphasize the hardships of crossing the Alps (one travels with a hangover from drinking to keep warm) is used here to build up the impression of stultifying lethargy. The poet combines his drunkenness with images of lassitude, disease, and, in the clauses that follow, death and decay, in order to create a contrast for the strenuous labor he will later expend to please his patron. The disjointed syntax of this opening sentence is obviously intended to enhance the effect.

Similarly, the visitor on whose behalf both acrostic and letter were written is described with the barest minimum of detail. Even his name is suppressed: Fortunatus universalizes his character by calling him “a fellow-captive,” “a fellow-citizen,” and most often, “a father.”<sup>12</sup> If Luchi is correct in assuming that the second of these terms makes the suppliant a native of Poitiers, where Fortunatus made his home from the late 560s, then we have the ghost of an explanation for the poet’s involvement: as an appeal to the bishop of Autun can only relate to some disturbance in his own district, Fortunatus must have been approached on an excursion into that vicinity.<sup>13</sup> But we do not

<sup>12</sup>The use of *concaptivus* is puzzling. Neither Fortunatus nor his visitor is a captive in fact, yet a figurative reading would be strained in the context. Leo suggests that *concaptivo* may be a scribal error for *concivi* (112); this is easier, but is contradicted by *mens captivi* in §10.

<sup>13</sup>Luchi col. 192 note k. A visit to Autun is otherwise unrecorded, although we know from the *Praefatio* to Gregory that Fortunatus traveled widely during the early 570s; like Syagrius, he was under the protection of Sigebert at this time (George 31, 29). George conjectures on the strength of *Carm.* 3.19 that the poet visited Nevers (32), which is about fifty miles west of Autun. All three acrostics must have been written before 576, when they were apparently included in the first published collection (Meyer 26).

learn these things from the letter directly. Nor do we learn the exact nature of the “disaster to his son” which is troubling Fortunatus’ visitor, or the extent of the financial assistance he requires—tactfully downplayed in the unassuming phrase *merces vestra*, “your wealth.” Instead, we read a great deal concerning the universal features of the encounter: the strength of parental love, the eloquence of tears, and the gentleness of compassion.

tantum est in caritate natura quod praevalet, ut parens ante se prodat  
affectu quam labio.

So much there is in love which prevails by nature, that the parent betrays  
himself sooner by his emotion than with his lips.

quis enim flenti non crederet quem lapis non genuit? quem non  
humanitas flecteret quem partus tigridis non effudit? cum lentiscat  
blanditiis cursus pardi, virtus apri, dens leonis et moles elephanti.

For who not born of a stone would fail to believe one who weeps? Who  
not brought forth by a tigress would not be moved by gentleness? For  
mild handling tames even the swiftness of the panther, the strength of the  
boar, the tooth of the lion, and the might of the elephant.

The technique of generalization enables Fortunatus to involve the recipient of the letter on a personal, emotional level in the interview that is taking place. By emphasizing the commonality between himself and the suppliant (*concaptivus*, *concivis*), he aligns his own position with that of the grieving father and captured son, even as he attempts to assist them. Meanwhile, in elaborating on the theme of parental love, he suggests the role to be assumed by the bishop, whom he naturally addresses as “Father” (*Papa*, in the salutation). Vivid images and emotive vocabulary are used to establish a link between the suppliant’s power of expression and the poet’s own, and again between Fortunatus’ response and the response expected from his patron.

The most striking element in the opening portion of the letter is a series of metaphorical paradoxes developing the theme of parental grief. Tears interrupt the suppliant’s speech, but declare him to be a father even in his silence; the tongue is silent, but the eyes speak through weeping; tears water both the seeds of grief and the crop of compassion. The last image in the series refers to the physical aspects of writing itself.

lacrimantes oculi querellas mihi fixerunt ad vicem incausti et admirabili  
modo aqua, quae delere solet, per fletus scripsit.

His tearful eyes set down his complaints for me in place of ink, and  
water, which usually erases, wrote, in a wondrous fashion, through  
weeping.

In the context of the presentation letter we have reason to suspect a reference in these lines to Fortunatus' own acrostic. The paradox of expressive speechlessness is particularly appropriate to figured composition with its own internal contradictions. Stammering from emotion, the father is unable to speak his request directly, and yet the very excess of his emotion creates, in the visible marks of the tears, a new form of expression which is both corporeal and verbal. Even so the figure-poem, stymied by the difficulty of its design, cannot make its appeal through fluency of diction, and yet gains in expressive power by mingling the textual with the pictorial mode. A narrative of the circumstances generating the acrostic has become a typological representation of its rhetorical appeal.

What is set forth typologically in the opening sections is soon to be made explicit as Fortunatus describes the process by which he has conceived and carried out his experiment in figured composition. The all-important moment, the one in which he makes the initial decision to address Syagrius in a figured acrostic, is recounted above: a line of Horace triggers an unusual aesthetic response. Of course, the interaction with Horace is likely enough to have been worked out after the fact, to justify an artifact already in existence. Even if we accept Fortunatus' account at face value, however, the project he now undertakes is shaped by the considerations of price and value which make themselves felt throughout this portion of his letter (§6-7). Some gift is to be sent "in exchange for the ransom-payment" (*pro redemptione*). Should it be something "of a son's value" (*quod suboles valeret*) or something "profitable" to Syagrius himself (*quod vobis proficeret*)? If the gift is too low in value, the ransom may be lowered accordingly. But what can an ordinary person offer in exchange for a favor of this kind? The invention of the figured acrostic provides, above all, an object, something that can be offered *pro captivo*, "on behalf of" but also "in exchange for" the captive. In keeping with the notion of price, both the subject matter and the form of the poem will also make special reference to Jesus as *redemptor* or "ransomer."

The logic of this curious progression of ideas, from Horace to theology, depends upon the quasi-monetary value of the acrostic as *objet d'art*. Fortunatus assumes, although he cannot say so outright, that his patron will value the piece highly enough to accept it as compensation. Only in this valuation will the expressive power of such a poem be fully realized. Like the father's tears, the figured appeal must win a response by what it is, rather than by what it articulates. But why should Syagrius accede to such an exalted estimate of the acrostic's worth? This is the question Fortunatus will attempt to answer in the remainder of his letter.

He addresses it first of all by describing the pains the acrostic has cost him. Deliberate effort has gone into every element of its design, including even the selection of a significant number of letters and a significant letter to stand in the center of the square. There are thirty-three lines of thirty-three letters, a number whose Christological significance is appropriate to the theme of redemption (Curtius 505). But the number also represents a technical challenge. Average line-length for the hexameter is roughly thirty-seven letters, and although composing one hexameter of thirty-three or even fewer letters might not present any special challenge, to sustain the effort through an entire poem of thirty-three lines proved taxing enough (cf. Schaller 24).

Hac protenus operis difficultate repulsus aut magis difficulter  
inclusus tam metri necessitate quam litterarum epitome quid facerem,  
quo prodirem? nova calculatione angustus mihi numerus angustias  
dilatavit, quia praefixo termino non erat nec ubi se prolixitas  
excuteret aut brevitatis angulare.

Immediately I was repelled by the difficulty of this task, or—what was more difficult—hemmed in, both by the requirements of meter and the limitation on letters. What was I to do? How was I to advance? On a further calculation the narrow measure enlarged my straits, for once the end of the line was predetermined, there was room neither for prolixity to extend itself, nor for conciseness to draw itself in.

For the sake of comparison, Optatian in his rectilinear acrostics opts for a line-length of either thirty-five or thirty-seven letters, as does Fortunatus himself in Poems 2.4 and 2.5.

Had it not been pointed out to us, we might well have passed over the significance of this restriction on length. Certainly we would have missed the poet's cleverness in selecting M, the median letter in the Latin alphabet, for the midpoint of his figure (§15). This seemingly jejune consideration has involved

Fortunatus in considerable difficulties, more in fact than were strictly necessary. Although the Latin language contains many words combining M with a consonant, Fortunatus places in the middle of each descending verse a word in which M is both preceded and followed by a vowel. The resulting vowel clusters in lines sixteen and eighteen focus our attention upon the problematic convergence of *versus intexti* at the center of the square, the more so as each has been incorporated into a Greek word in the horizontal verse.<sup>14</sup>

R E P T A N T I S Q : D O L O E O O I S E X C L V D I T V R O R T V  
 H A C N A T I M O R I M V R D A M N A T I L E G E P A R E N T U M  
 A T D E U S E X C E L L E N S A I E E T D E L V M I N E L V M E N  
 (16-18)

And by the trickery of the serpent was mankind shut out from the rising of Dawn (*eois*). By this law of our parents are we born, and damned by it we die. But God, the forever (*aie*) excelling and Light of Light ...

In part, Fortunatus' interest in middles (middle of the alphabet, middle of the poem) is a matter of aesthetics, a feeling that a poem which exhibits such elaborate symmetry of design can only gain in attractiveness from the addition of other symmetrical features. Besides the arrangement of vowels and Greek words above and below the center, we may notice also in this connection the strong internal rhyme in line seventeen (*nati . . . damnati*), again framing the central M, and more important, a shift of theme at just this point from the fall of humanity (lines 1-16) to the free gift of redemption (17-33). In the letter to Syagrius, however, Fortunatus stresses not his aesthetic achievement in devising this centripetal plan of arrangement, so well suited to figured composition, but rather the personal challenge of finding a letter that will not create problems for him (*ut offenderet neminem*, §9).

The greatest challenge of all is the composition of metrically correct horizontal verses that will properly accommodate the five *versus intexti*. This is the point at which the composition of Poem 2.5 broke down [see Figure 3], and Fortunatus goes to great lengths in his letter to make the difficulties seem almost insurmountable. The language describing the creative process here becomes almost impassioned in its vividness and elaboration. The crisscrossed *versus intexti* become strands (*fila, licia*) in a complex piece of weaving (*ordi-*

<sup>14</sup>On Fortunatus' knowledge of Greek, see Blomgren 28, George 21-22.

*tura, exordio*), then are transformed again into a bridle to check the poet's creative wandering:

nec evagari propter descendentes versus frenante repagulo orditura  
permisit. in quo quippe exordio supercrescente apice non licuit vel  
solvere vel fila laxare, ne numerum transiliens erratica se tela  
turbaret.

Nor did the weaving permit me to roam, since the descending verses  
served as a bridle and a restraint. In fact, in this web it was not possible  
to untie or loosen the strands by a single superfluous letter, lest a  
wandering thread exceed the measure and become tangled.

The language of restraint and bondage is appropriate both to the stated purpose of the work and to the actual process of composition. In order for Syagrius to unbind the captive townspeople, Fortunatus' verses must give up the possibility of being untied or loosened. Meanwhile their creator is also bound, achieving release for another by the constraints he places on himself:

incipiens ego opere propter absoluturo ligari, atque mutata vice,  
dum captivi solvere lora cupio, me catena constringo.

I begin myself to be tied up in a work which is soon to release another:  
as I wish to untie the thongs of a captive, I in turn bind myself with a  
chain.

Again the pregnant term *solvere* comes into play, here to denote a series of redemptive acts which are both causally and typologically interrelated. The verbal *absoluturo*, whose grammatical subject here is the poem itself, recalls the use of *absolvere* in §8 to refer to the divine act of redemption (cf. §14 *nos absolvit unus resurgens*). As noted above, the saving act of Jesus, with its associations of release and payment (*solvere, absolvere, munus, merx*) is the primary theme of the acrostic itself, and the *versus intexti* explicitly refer this theme to the request being made of Syagrius. The same connection repeated even more forcefully in the final lines of the horizontal text, where once again the bishop is assigned both to imitate Christ's act and to share in the benefit of it.

actu hac soluis captivos sorte creator  
sero uera data est uitalis emptio morte  
ymnos unde deo loquor absolvente reatu  
at uos aeternae suffulti laude coronae

gallorum radii uobis quo fulgeat et nox  
 rumpite lora iugis et sumitis arma diei  
 ipsaue libertas uos liberat atq' beabit

By this act you release captives, Creator, by your will;  
 finally is granted the true life-giving purchase from death.  
 Therefore I speak hymns to God, being released from indemnity.  
 But you, who are supported by the praise of an eternal crown,  
 the diadem of the Gauls, which causes even night to shine on you,  
 break the thongs from the yokes, and you take up the arms of day,  
 and Freedom itself frees you and will bless you.

Now, where does the poet situate *himself* in this neat set of reciprocal relations? He too is a beneficiary of the Redemption, *absolvente reatu*; in the letter, although not in the acrostic, he is also a releaser and redeemer in his own right, for his poetry will act as a means of release, and his desire is to “untie the thongs of a captive.” The expenditure by which he will achieve this end is however not financial but personal. Rather than paying ransom-money, he will offer himself in the captives’ place through the constricting medium of figured composition.

The problem of composition under constraint is theoretically the most interesting issue raised by the project, and one Fortunatus explores at some length. Because of the limit on line-length and the need to accommodate the interwoven verses, the poet is restricted in his choice of expressions, even forced at times to adopt a phrase he dislikes. In addition, each word and even each letter that he selects will further restrict his freedom, since only certain spaces and certain grammatical constructions will remain available. *Figis nec fugis litteram*, remarks Fortunatus: “You fix the letter in place, and you cannot escape from it.” This indeed is poetry in captivity, poetry in which the act of creation—here reduced to the setting down of a single letter—is an act of binding and being bound. Fortunatus finds a visible symbol for his dilemma in the net-like pattern formed by the *versus intexti*, the primary obstacles to his progress.

itaque cum penderet haec tela laqueata, ut si duo transirem, adhuc tria  
 non fugerem, ego incautus passer quasi mentita per nubila incurri  
 pantheram, quia quod cavere volebam huc pinna ligabar, aut magis, ut  
 dictum sit, velut plumis inlitis quinquifida viscatura tendebat.

And so this web lay snared about with verses in such a way that even if I  
 got by two strands, still there were three I could not avoid. I, an

incautious sparrow, came as it were through deceiving gauze-nets into a snare,<sup>15</sup> for I was bound by my plume in the very thing I wished to escape, or rather was as if stretched with smeared quills, so to speak, upon a limed twig of five branchings.

Here visual and verbal, metaphoric and literal elements are strangely mixed. The clear reference of “two strands” and “three” to the five descending *versus intexti* turns the poet’s flight into a physical movement through the text, as if the progress being interrupted were literally a matter of making one’s way from left to right across the page. A system of puns reinforces the metaphor of textuality. The singular noun *pinna*, referring to the feathers by which the bird becomes entangled and with which it struggles to fly to safety, is identical with the *pinna* or “pen” which the poet is using to create difficulties for himself. Again, in a midstream revision of the image, the “quills” which are smeared with birdlime from a “limed twig of five branchings” are also quills as writing implements, “smeared” with the ink of the fivefold *versus intexti*. In this vivid detail we actually see the physical substance of the poem, its ink, paper, and spatial disposition, capturing the poet’s intentions and rendering them helpless.

The ingenuity of the preceding conceit does not appear to reduce the writer’s expectation of producing an emotional effect. The pathos inherent in the sparrow image is an important reason for using it, and Fortunatus develops it at length not only to display his cleverness but also to involve Syagrius affectively in the narrative of the poem’s creation. He now brings this patronal emotion directly into the narrative, making it the crucial factor in his own success:

tamen, licet invitus, loquor paene quae nescio; et tu me vincis amore,  
ne vincar ab opere. ecce exigis a me et quod in me vix invenis;  
violentiam facis qui tuus, non rebellis est: extorques nec repelleris;  
amor blandus tyrannus est.

Still, though unwilling, I speak—in what words, I scarcely know—and you by your love prevail upon me not to let the task prevail. See how you require of me even what you scarcely find in me; you use force on one who is not a rebel, but your own man; you extort, and are not refused. Love is a mild tyrant.

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<sup>15</sup>The translation “snare” for *panthera* is confirmed by Luchi col. 194 note 1, citing the parallel usage of Gr. *panthera*. “Gauze-nets” for *nubila* is likewise supported by the context and by the usage of Gr. *nephelê*. These two terms should be added to Blomgren’s list of neologisms and Grecisms in Fortunatus.



The poet has been reduced by the demands of the acrostic form to utter helplessness, so that even in his cry for help he is scarcely in control of his words. Power to realize his complex design is not to be found in him alone but must be borrowed from a powerful emotional bond, one he describes in intense, almost erotic terms: note especially the forceful verbs *vincis*, *exigis*, *extorques* “you conquer/convince, you demand, you extort.” The bishop is made to command the work as a mistress might demand presents; it is an affectionate commanding, however, and empowers creation.

Ut hoc pararem commercii, per incertum pelagi rudis nauta vela  
suspendi: affectu raptus deferor per fluctus et scopulos. urges me prae-  
cipitem per ignota transire: quid est quod non obtineas? sicut amas, sic  
imperas.

To prepare this merchandise, I, an unskilled sailor, set sail upon an  
uncertain sea and, seized by emotion, was borne through the waves and  
rocks. At your urging I travel swiftly on through the unknown: what  
could you not gain from me? As you love, so do you command.

The frustrated and incapacitated sparrow has been replaced with the sailboat, image of freedom and forward progress. Though unskilled and in unfamiliar waters, Fortunatus has found in his patron’s love a ship that will carry him to his destination (for the nautical metaphor, Curtius 128-29).

If the emotive vocabulary in use here is more emphatic than we might have expected in an address to a bishop, it is because more is at stake here than a protocol of elaborate but empty compliment. Emotion is an important theme in the letter, and one that reinforces directly its urgent rhetorical appeal. The patronal *affectus* that carries the poet through the breakers and rocks is a reflex of that *affectus* which cried out from the grieving father of §3 and into which Fortunatus himself was “almost wholly transported” (§4). Although the father’s love is denoted specifically by *pietas*, while Fortunatus’ response as quasi-patron is labeled *humanitas*, both are linked to Syagrius’ *amor* by association with the distinctive adjective *blandus*. Tears are stung from the father’s eyes “with mild cries” (*blandito ploratu*, §2); Fortunatus’ gentleness is a natural response to “mild handling” (*blanditiis*, §4); love like Syagrius’ is a “mild tyrant” (*blandus tyrannus*, §12). My translation “mild,” however, is very inadequate for the *blandus* complex, which connotes a charming or wheedling mildness, the ability to carry one’s request equally without physical compulsion and without reasoned argument. Love is by nature persuasive and persuadable.

The poet appears at the center of a double set of analogies whose import Syagrius is meant to feel: as the captured son is to his father, so is Fortunatus, entangled in his acrostic, to his father the bishop, and as the weeping father was to Fortunatus, so is Fortunatus, inarticulate in his perplexity, to the patron who can help him. By thus drawing Syagrius into a network of personal relations, Fortunatus has provided a further motivation for extending aid to the captives of Autun.

The rhetorical strategy of the letter is now complete. In emphasizing what I called the physicality of this text, the poet has claimed for his work a tangible worth as art object which may repay the patron for his expenditure of money. In addition, he has used the labor involved in figured composition as an argument for setting a high valuation on the result. Despite its aesthetic limitations, still the acrostic as object of wonder and proof of devotion deserves a generous response. By dramatizing his own difficulties in producing the work, Fortunatus has also managed to transform his formal petition into a highly personal, emotional appeal. This level of expression seems particularly well-suited to the rhetoric of figured composition, which is most powerful as a demonstration of feeling independent of language like the father's tears of §4, a kind of voiceless gesture toward the relationship between composer and recipient.

Once all these issues have been addressed, we might have expected the letter to proceed directly to its concluding protestations of gratitude and unending service. Before closing, however, Fortunatus wishes to return to the issue he raised in §7 while pondering the term *artifex*. We noted above that the modesty formula "even if not by an artist" brings a certain intensity to the acrostic-maker's self-description, as if his position relative to the more conventional literary and pictorial arts had yet to be established. Having now completed his project, Fortunatus is in a position to return to the claims to be made for the acrostic as an art form. After enumerating once again the remarkable features of his poem—the thirty-three lines and letters with their Christological significance, the central position of M, and most of all, the five descending verses which knit the work together both spatially and temporally—he begins to dwell at greater length than before on the idea of weaving. Long familiar as an image of literary artistry, the woven tapestry has here a specific pictorial application, which Fortunatus is careful to explain.

littera vero quae tinguitur in descendenti versiculo, et tenetur in uno et currit in altero et, ut ita dicatur, et stat pro stamine et pro trama currit in tramite, ut esse potest in pagina: licia litterata.

But any letter which is tinted in a descending verse is both contained in the one and runs crosswise with the other: it both stands upright, so to speak, as the warp, and runs crosswise as the weft—so far as may be on the page, a literary looming.

The correspondences are almost too exact: vertical rows of letters represent warp-threads, horizontal rows the weft, while the tinted letters—colored with *minium*, red ink, in place of *coccinum*, scarlet dye—represent the colored threads which create the pattern (§16). The point of this figurative tour-de-force is to suggest a model for the activity of the acrostic-maker. His merit differs from that of the Horatian poet in the same way that the tapestry-maker's art differs from that of the painter: careful, meticulous craftsmanship, rather than freedom and grace of expression, is what confers value on his work. But could it not be alleged that such craftsmanship is in reality only mechanical and utterly expressionless productivity, like the instinctive weaving of spiders? Fortunatus has an answer:

Ne tamen causa nos oneret, quod velut aragnaea arte videmur picta  
fila miscere: quod vobis conpertum est in Moysi prophetae libris,  
polymitarius *artifex* vestes texuit sacerdotis.

Still, let us not be troubled about seeming to entangle painted threads as by the spider's art. You may find it written in the books of the prophet Moses: the artful damask-maker has woven the garments of the priest.

The allusion to Exodus (cf. Ex. 28:23, 29:1-8) has been chosen with care. Not only does it present the craft of weaving in the best light possible—for the vestments woven there are splendid beyond compare—but it also pays a nice compliment to Syagrius in its mention of the high-priest Aaron. Further, the phrase *polymitarius artifex* enables Fortunatus to score a rhetorical coup: by sacralizing the connection between weaver and *artifex*, he borrows Scriptural authority for assuming the title he earlier disclaimed. Moses is made to answer Horace, and the role of acrostic-maker takes on a dignity it might not otherwise have had.

## APPENDIX: Fortunatus, Epistle 5.6a

## TO MY REVEREND LORD AND FATHER SYAGRIUS, BISHOP MOST WORTHY OF THE APOSTOLIC SEE

In the torpor of witless idleness, in which the drunken mind babbles, growing brutish with a long decay turning to disease, I was overcome as by the weary faintness of lazy sleep, and drowsed untroubled by any biting care for my favored occupation. It seemed in fact that all my reading went unread, my talent untapped, nor did I find in my circumstances any theme which might be treated in poetry: to coin an expression, nothing was being carded from the fleece which might be spun into song.<sup>16</sup> I had somehow buried myself within myself in a tomb of silence, for I was singing no songs, and had grown rusty, my tongue's plectrum forgotten.

Then at last a fellow-captive was brought to me, unexpectedly, and yet, I think, by Your Grace's good fortune. As I was questioning him as to who he was, where he came from, and what was his business, he burst into speech concerning a disaster to his son, pleading his own need, my compassion, and your wealth. His voice was interrupted by a betraying sob that scarcely gave him ease. But while he was prevented from speaking, as much by the grief of his belly as by the river from his eyes, his tears confessed him a father in his very silence. For even as the father hung anxiously on the word he did not utter, his eye spoke through weeping, while his mouth's instrument was silent. So much there is in love which prevails by nature, that the parent betrays himself sooner by his emotion than with his lips.

(2) And so his eyes were pouring forth their suggestion, punctuated by such mild cries that his laments would render the harshest hearer merciful. Tears watered both the seed of distress and the crop of pity; from one fountain flowed the substance of grief and of aid, sorrow and wealth from a single source, so that, one man streaming from the eyes, the other drinking with ears, what the former pressed out in weeping, the latter bottled up for use.<sup>17</sup> (3) In this way the prisoner's mind made itself understood by a sign, which was his

<sup>16</sup>The puns are untranslatable: *nihil velleretur* ("pluck") *ex vellere* ("fleece") *quod carminaretur* ("card"/"chant") *in carmine* ("verses").

<sup>17</sup>The image is of a wine-press (*torcular* . . . *apothecaret*).

sobbing, and the grief in his face reflected as in a mirror the pain that appeared in his heart. Hence we assessed the situation between us without speaking, and until he was able to say as well as weep the matter in my presence, emotion seemed wondrously to speak in this way without a tongue.

(4) Thus as he moved me who was my pitiable compatriot in loss as well as in country, as I looked upon the father's face drenched with a storm of parental love, so that I myself was almost wholly transported in the emotion of another, his tearful eyes set down his complaints for me in place of ink, and water, which usually erases, wrote, in a wondrous fashion, through weeping. For who not born of a stone would fail to believe one who weeps? Who not brought forth by a tigress would not be moved by gentleness? For mild handling tames even the swiftness of the panther, the strength of the boar, the tooth of the lion, and the might of the elephant. (5) At last, after the noise of his complaints was quieted, he named you as the remedy agreeable to his pain: that is, being sick in mind, he asked for a palliative to his woe, and said that your tongue would be the cure, if it should graciously expend itself. While he was yet speaking, I interjected myself in the midst of his words: judging that I might have confidence where you are concerned, I assured him that I would consult you on this matter, and told him not to cry.

(6) But I had still to figure out what I would send in exchange for the ransom-money: ought it to be something of the value of a son, or something which would be of use to you? I was considering the total expenditure, lest you should set the prisoner's price at lower value because of the cheapness of my gift. I feared, in fact, that if caught out in the small sum, my case might be lost in the large sum, especially since I should like you, together with the saint, to enjoy a proper share of your treasure. (7) But what could mediocrity offer in exchange for aid? While I was hesitating over the choice, there occurred to me, sluggish as I was, a tag from Pindaric Horace, "Poets and painters have always had equal power to venture on whatever they choose."<sup>18</sup> Thinking over this line, I asked myself, "If either artist can mix up whatever he wishes, why should not both things be mixed together, even if not by an artist, so that poetry and painting would be woven at the same time and in a single fabric?"

(8) Then, as I wished to make an offering in verse on behalf of a captive, I noted the age of our Redeemer: I might weave a poem of as many lines and as many letters as was Christ's year of life when He ransomed us. Immediately I

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<sup>18</sup>Hor. *Ars* 7-8. Horace is called *Pindaricus* on account of his odes, even though the epithet is unrelated to the *Ars Poetica*.

was repelled by the difficulty of this task, or—what was more difficult—hemmed in, both by the requirements of meter and the limitation on letters. What was I to do? How was I to advance? On a further calculation the narrow measure enlarged my straits, for once the end of the line was predetermined, there was room neither for prolixity to extend itself, nor for conciseness to draw itself in. Nor did the weaving permit me to roam, since the descending verses served as a bridle and a restraint. In fact, in this web it was not possible to untie or loosen the strands by a single superfluous letter, lest a wandering thread exceed the measure and become tangled. (9) Then I was concerned to ensure that two unbroken verses be read down the initial and final letters, two on the diagonal, and one down the middle. A further consideration was this: which of all the letters should I place in the very middle, to receive them all in such a way as not to confound any?

(10) Accordingly, when I had gathered up all the strands of this web in measure and began to weave them, the threads burst both themselves and me. I begin myself to be tied up in a work which is soon to release another: as I wish to untie the thongs of a captive, I in turn bind myself with a chain. For by this you may imagine the difficulty of this small work: wherever you turn, if you add, the line grows longer; if you subtract, the grace is lost; if you change anything, the initial letters do not fit together. You fix the letter in place, and you cannot escape from it. (11) And so this web lay snared about with verses in such a way that even if I got by two strands, still there were three I could not avoid. I, an incautious sparrow, came as it were through deceiving gauze-nets into a snare,<sup>19</sup> for I was bound by my plume in the very thing I wished to escape, or rather was as if stretched with smeared quills, so to speak, upon a limed twig of five branchings. Amid these troubles I was worried by the fact that not only had I never done such a thing, but I was proceeding without the guidance of any similar model.

(12) Unsure and trembling from these thoughts, uncertain, because of the very newness of it, whether I should try out what I had never before endeavored, or, with more caution, give over my incautious proceeding, still, though unwilling, I speak—in what words, I scarcely know—and you by your love prevail upon me not to let the task prevail. See how you require of me even what you scarcely find in me; you use force on one who is not a rebel, but your own man; you extort, and are not refused. Love is a mild tyrant. (13) To prepare this merchandise, I, an unskilled sailor, set sail upon an uncertain sea

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<sup>19</sup>See above, n. 15.

and, seized by emotion, was borne through the waves and rocks. At your urging I travel swiftly on through the unknown: what could you not gain from me? As you love, so do you command.

(14) Therefore you have the work, made foursquare in one weaving, so as to be five-branched in the reading, and although there are thirty-three lines as well as letters, in similitude of that fleshly age at which the one man Christ ransomed us by His resurrection, still two lines read downward through the initial and final letters, two diagonally, and also one through the middle. Thus it happens that at the end of each line, the letter is not finished, for although it has reached the end in a horizontal direction, a further reading remains for it vertically, since it is still joined into the verse at endings. (15) Now, in the middle of this small work, I have placed that letter which among the twenty-three is counted midmost, which looks back on as many before it as it precedes coming behind.<sup>20</sup> For where the verses come together, the whole is divided, and yet though divided remains unbroken. But any letter which is tinted in a descending verse is both contained in the one and runs crosswise with the other: it both stands upright, so to speak, as the warp, and runs crosswise as the weft—so far as may be on the page, a literary looming.

(16) Still, let us not be troubled about seeming to entangle painted threads as by the spider's art. You may find it written in the books of the prophet Moses: the artful damask-maker has woven the garments of the priest.<sup>21</sup> Wherefore, since there is no scarlet here, the stuff is woven in red ink. Now the verses descending diagonally from the corners stand up in the count, although they lean in position. But as to the quality of their composition, or the content of each, discretion will be satisfied to judge of the matter without being told.

(17) In sum, I commend myself to your loving blessedness and overflowing sweetness, which grant the requests of one confident in a vicariety of servitude. If it please you, let this work be inscribed upon the wall, and the painting guard the vestibule in place of me, your door-servant. Pray for me.

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<sup>20</sup>There are twenty-three letters in the Latin alphabet.

<sup>21</sup>Fortunatus paraphrases Ex. 38.23, 39.1.

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**D**I**V**S**A**P**E**X**C**A**R**N**E**E**F**F**I**G**I**A**N**S**G**E**N**E**T**A**L**I**A**L**I**M**I**  
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**V**T**P**A**R**A**D**Y**S**S**I**A**C**O**B**E**N**E**L**A**E**T**A**R**E**T**V**R**I**N**H**O**R**T**O**  
**S**E**D**D**E**S**E**D**E**P**I**A**E**P**V**L**I**T**T**E**M**E**R**A**B**I**L**E**G**V**T**T**V**R  
**S**E**R**P**E**N**T**I**S**S**V**A**S**V**P**O**M**O**S****V**C**O**A**T**R**A**P**R**O**P**I**N**A**N**S  
**I**N**S**A**T**I**A**T**R**I**C**I**M**O**R**T**I**F**A**M**E**S**A**C**C**I**D**I**T**I**L**L**I**N**C**  
**G**A**V**I**S**V**R**O**S**O**B**H**O**C**C**A**E**L**I**F**L**V**I**S**A**R**C**E**L**O**C**A**T**O**R**  
**N**A**S**C**I**P**R**O**N**O**B**I**S**M**I**S**E**R**A**R**I**S**E**T**V**L**C**E**R**E**C**L**A**V**I**  
**I**N**C**R**V**C**E**C**O**N**F**I**G**I**T**A**L**I**M**A**L**A**G**M**A**T**E**I**N**V**N**C**T**I**S**  
**V**N**A**S**A**L**V**S**N**O**B**I**S**L**I**G**N**O**A**G**N**I**S**A**N**G**V**I**N**E**V**E**N**I**T**  
**I**V**C**V**N**D**A**S**P**E**C**I**E**S**I**N**T**E**P**I**A**B**R**A**C**C**H**I**A**C**R**I**S**T**I**  
**A**F**F**I**X**A**S**T**E**T**E**R**V**N**T**E**T**P**A**L**M**A**B**E**A**B**I**L**I**S**I**N**H**A**C**  
**C**A**R**A**C**A**R**O**P**A**E**N**A**S**I**N**M**I**T**E**S**S**V**S**T**V**L**I**T**H**A**V**S**T**V**  
**A**R**B**O**R**S**V**A**V**I**S**A**G**R**I**T**E**C**V**M**N**O**V**A**V**I**T**A**P**A**R**A**T**V**R**  
**E**L**E**C**T**A**V**T**V**I**S**V**S**I**C**E**C**R**V**C**I**S**O**R**D**I**N**E**P**V**L**C**H**R**A**  
**L**V**M**E**N**S**P**E**S**S**C**V**T**V**M**G**E**R**E**R**I**S**L**I**V**O**R**I**S**A**B**I**C**T**V**  
**I**N**M**O**R**T**A**L**E**D**E**C**V**S**N**E**C**E**I**V**S**T**I**L**A**E**T**A**P**A**R**A**S**T**I**  
**V**N**A**O**M**N**E**M**V**I**T**A**M**S**I**C**C**R**V**X**T**V**A**C**A**V**S**A**R**I**G**A**V**I**T**  
**I**M**B**R**E**C**R**V**E**N**T**A**P**I**O**V**E**L**I**S**D**A**S**N**A**V**I**T**A**P**O**R**T**V**M**  
**T**R**I**S**T**I**A**S**V**M**M**E**R**S**O**M**V**N**D**A**S**T**I**V**V**L**N**E**R**A**C**L**A**V**O**  
**A**R**B**O**R**D**V**L**C**I**S**A**G**R**I**R**O**R**A**N**S**E**C**O**R**T**I**C**E**N**E**C**T**A**R**  
**R**A**M**I**S**D**E**C**V**I**V**S**V**I**T**A**L**I**A**C**R**I**S**M**A**T**A**F**R**A**G**R**A**N**T**  
**E**X**C**E**L**L**E**N**S**C**V**L**T**V**D**I**V**A**O**R**T**V**F**V**L**G**I**D**A**F**R**V**C**T**V**  
**D**E**L**I**C**I**O**S**A**C**I**B**O**E**T**P**E**R**P**O**M**A**S**V**A**V**I**S**I**N**V**M**B**R**A**  
**E**N**R**E**G**I**S**M**A**G**N**I**G**E**M**M**A**N**T**E**M**E**T**N**O**B**I**L**E**S**I**G**N**V**M**  
**M**V**R**V**S**E**T**A**R**M**A**V**I**R**I**S**V**I**R**T**V**S**L**V**X**A**R**A**P**R**E**C**A**T**V**  
**P**A**N**D**E**B**E**N**I**G**N**A**V**I**A**M**V**I**V**A**X**E**T**F**E**R**T**I**L**E**L**V**M**E**N**  
**T**V**M**M**E**M**O**R**A**D**F**E**R**O**P**E**M**N**O**B**I**S**E**G**E**R**M**I**N**E**D**A**V**I**D**  
**I**N**C**R**V**C**E**R**E**X**F**I**X**V**S**I**V**D**E**X**C**V**M**P**R**A**E**E**R**I**T**O**R**B**I**

Fig. 1: Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina* 2.4

**D I V S A P E X A D A M V T F E C I T D A T S O M N I A D O N E C**  
**A V V L S A C O S T A P L A S M A T A E S T E V A N E C I N P A R**  
**F E L I C E S P A R I T E R D I P L O I D E L V C I S O P E R T I**  
**O R E C O R V S C A N T E S I N T E R P I A R V R A I V G A L E S**  
**R I P A E I V C V N D A E N A R I G R A T A A V R A R E D I B A T**  
**T V R I S D E L I C I A E S A T V R A B A N T V B E R E F L A T V**  
**V N A F O V E N S A M B O S F L O R O S A S E D E V O L V P T A S**  
**N O T A B O N I S R E G I O P A S C E B A T T E M P E B E A T O S**  
**A T C V M T A M M A G N O P O L L E R E N T M A I V S H O N O R E**  
**T O T A H O M I N V M M I R E P A R E B A T T E R R A D V O R V M**  
**O C C V L T V S M E N D A X M O X E X E R I T A R M A V E N E N I**  
**S E R P E N S E L A T V S Z E L A T O R L A R V E V S H O S T I S**  
**A T R O X I N N O C V O S E V I N C E N S F E L L E N O C E N T I**  
**C O N L I S I T S V A S V Q V O S G R A T I A D I V A B E A R A T**  
**E T H O M O D E T E R R A T V M D E N V O D E C I D I T I L L V C**  
**R E P T A N T I S Q : D O L O E O O I S E X C L V D I T V R O R T V**  
**H A C N A T I M O R I M V R D A M N A T I L E G E P A R E N T V M**  
**A T D E V S E X C E L L E N S A I E E T D E L V M I N E L V M E N**  
**E C A E L I S O L I O D V M M V N E R A P R O V I D E T V L T R O**  
**C A S T A E C A R N E R V D I V I V A X I N T R O I I T A G N V S**  
**P R O D I I T I N D E S A L V S M A T V T I N I V E L V C E R N A**  
**I N T A C T A E P A R T V L V X E R V I T E X C I T A M V N D V M**  
**A P A T R E I V R E D S H O M O D E H I N C C A R N E V S A L V O**  
**V T N O S E R I P E R E T V I L I S E D E T R A H I T A V C T O R**  
**O R E G I S V E N A L E C A P V T Q V O D D E C R V C E F I X I T**  
**T E L O V O C E M A N V M A L F A C T V S V E R B E R E F E L L E**  
**A C T V H A C S O L V I S C A P T I V O S S O R T E C R E A T O R**  
**S E R O V E R A D A T A E S T V I T A L I S E M P T I O M O R T E**  
**Y M N O S V N D E D E O L O Q V O R A B S O L V E N T E R E A T V**  
**A T V O S A E T E R N A E S V F F V L T I L A V D E C O R O N A E**  
**G A L L O R V M R A D I I V O B I S Q V O F V L G E A T E T N O X**  
**R V M P I T E L O R A I V G I S E T S V M I T I S A R M A D I E I**  
**I P S A V E L I B E R T A S V O S L I B E R A T A T Q B E A B I T**

Fig. 2: Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina* 5.6

Fig. 3: Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina* 2.5