Okáčová, Marie

Ut imago poesis : apastiche of Virgil and Ovid in the cento Narcissus

MARIE OKÁČOVÁ (MASARYK UNIVERSITY, BRNO)

UT IMAGO POESIS: A PASTICHE OF VIRGIL AND OVID IN THE CENTO *NARCISSUS*[1]

The aim of the paper is to produce a close textual analysis of the short Virgilian cento Narcissus *(*AL *9 R), which has so far attracted only little attention of classical scholarship. An examination of the poem's compositional structure, its imagery and register, and, last but not least, of its significant allusions to both Virgil and other Latin treatments of the Narcissus myth is provided. Further, the cento's underlying metatextual significance, as well as the possibilities of its interpretation in terms of the Lacanian concept of the "mirror stage" and Derridean deconstruction, is discussed.*

The surviving miscellaneous collection of late antique centos has aroused intensive scholarly interest especially since the 1980s, when classical philologists began to recognize the unique literary status of these unparalleled patchwork texts composed of stichs or hemistichs adopted from canonical authors, namely from Homer or Virgil, with whose poetry they engage, by definition, in a continual metatextual dialogue.[2] For obvious reasons, the relatively recent upsurge of cento studies[3] has involved the more complex and accomplished poems rather than the

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[1] This paper was written under the auspices of the *Centre for Interdisciplinary Research into Ancient Languages and Early Stages of Modern Languages* (research program MSM 0021622435) at Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic.

[2] Generally speaking, the gradual rethinking of the concept of canonical literature, together with the development of modern literary theories such as the theory of intertextuality, has resulted in a more liberal view on the entire literary output of late antiquity, including such blatantly derivative poetry as the cento. On the changing views on the cento, see BAŽIL, MARTIN. 2002. „*De alieno nostrum:* Les centons de l'Antiquité tardive et la théorie de l'intertextualité." *LF,* 125, 1–2, 1–23. For a list of specific stimuli for the rise of studies devoted to the patchwork texts, see SALANITRO, GIOVANNI. 1997. „Osidio Geta e la poesia centonaria." In HAASE, WOLFGANG [ED.]. *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt.* Vol. II. 34.3. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2315f.

[3] The existing literature on the ancient centos includes preliminary text-critical studies, modern critical and commented editions of the individual cento pieces, their critical interpretations, and theoretically based examinations of particular aspects of the cento poetics. For a comprehensive bibliography on the cento, see, e.g., LAMACCHIA, ROSA. 1984. Sub voce „Centoni." In DELLA CORTE, FRANCESCO [ED.]. *Enciclopedia Virgiliana.* Vol. I. Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 736f.; or G. SALANITRO (1997: 2357ff.).

somewhat obscure and insubstantial pieces.[4] One of the least scrutinized among the Virgilian cento treatments of mythological subjects is the short and slightly ambiguous piece *Narcissus*[5] preserved in the *Codex Salmasianus* of the *Anthologia Latina* (*AL* 9 R[6]), a collection of Latin poetry compiled in Africa in the sixth century AD. This sixteen-line anonymous poem is an elliptical recounting of the fascinating story about a beautiful, lovesick youth who unconsciously falls for his own reflection in a pool; however, the piece does not describe the very climax of the myth, the metamorphosis of Narcissus into a lovely flower bearing his name. The basic underlying themes introduced in the discussed minor composition are fairly clear; as any other handling of the hopeless fate of Narcissus, the cento implicitly raises questions about the recognition of one's own self, about the perils of self-love, and about the captivating and deceptive nature of reflection, which constitutes a merely inane imitation of the original, or a counterfeit copy of the genuine. Nevertheless, the Virgilian fabric, or rather intertexture, which basically authorizes the very existence of this derivative and quintessentially metapoetical piece, provides the *Narcissus*, as will be proposed for consideration, with further interesting overtones and implications, making it a particularly rich text in terms of semantics.

A thorough analysis of the implicit dimensions of the *Narcissus* requires an examination of its compositional scheme, its imagery, and the significance of its far-reaching intertextual links.[7] The length of the cento permits me to quote it as a whole and specify the *loci Vergiliani*[8] by means of which the poem has been seamed together:[9]

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[4]   Classical scholarship has focused marked attention particularly on the cento *Medea*, a quasi-tragedy by Hosidius Geta, the Christian *Cento Probae*, and the Christian *Homerocentones* of the empress Eudocia.

[5]   On the obscure phrasing, lexical poverty, and formal shortcomings of the cento, see SCHENKL, KARL [ED.]. 1888. *Poetae Christiani Minores. Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum,* 16. Wien: Tempsky, 534; ERMINI, FILIPPO. 1909. *Il centone di Proba e la poesia centonaria latina.* Roma: Loescher, 43; VALLOZZA, MADDALENA. 1986. „Rilievi di tecnica compositiva nei centoni tramandati con la *Medea* dal codice Salmasiano." In *Studi in onore di Adelmo Barigazzi.* Vol. 1. Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 336; G. SALANITRO (1997: 2338f.); and MCGILL, SCOTT. 2005. *Virgil Recomposed: The Mythological and Secular Centos in Antiquity.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 77.

[6]   RIESE, ALEXANDER [ED.]. 1894[2]. *Anthologia Latina sive Poesis Latinae Supplementum. Pars Prior: Carmina in Codicibus Scripta. Fasc. I: Libri Salmasiani Aliorumque Carmina.* Leipzig: Teubner.

[7]   A similar study has been produced by S. MCGILL (2005: 76–79), who, however, overlooks several, in my view, significant details.

[8]   If not stated otherwise, the texts of ancient authors I use in this paper were all taken from *Bibliotheca Teubneriana Latina* [database online]. 2002[2]. München: K. G. Saur; Turnhout: Brepols. URL: <http://litterae.phil.muni.cz/index.php> [accessed 2009].

[9]   Since there is no modern critical edition of the *Narcissus* available, the text followed here is Riese's (see note 6).

candida per silvam (*Aen.* 8.82) primaevo flore iuventus (*Aen.* 7.162)
adsidue veniebat: ibi haec (*Ecl.* 2.4) caelestia dona (*Georg.* 4.1)
et fontes sacros (*Ecl.* 1.52) insigni laude ferebat (*Aen.* 1.625)
insignis facie (*Aen.* 9.583) longumque bibebat amorem, (*Aen.* 1.749)
intentos volvens oculos, (*Aen.* 7.251) securus amorum. (*Aen.* 1.350)   5
dum stupet (*Aen.* 1.495) atque animum pictura pascit inani, (*Aen.* 1.464)
expleri mentem nequit ardescitque tuendo (*Aen.* 1.713)
egregium forma iuvenem, (*Aen.* 6.861) quem nympha crearat: (*Aen.* 10.551)
sic oculos, sic ille manus, sic ora ferebat. (*Aen.* 3.490)
his amor unus erat, (*Aen.* 9.182) dorso dum pendet iniquo, (*Aen.* 10.303)   10
oblitusve sui est (*Aen.* 3.629) et membra decora iuventae (*Aen.* 4.559)
miratur rerumque ignarus imagine gaudet. (*Aen.* 8.730)
ilicet ignis edax (*Aen.* 2.758) secreti ad fluminis undas (*Aen.* 3.389)
ipsius in vultu (*Georg.* 1.452) vana spe lusit amantem, (*Aen.* 1.352)
et praeceps animi (*Aen.* 9.685) collo dare brachia circum (*Aen.* 2.792 or 6.700)   15
ter conatus (*Aen.* 2.792 or 6.700) erat (*Aen.* 6.32) nec, quid speraret, habebat. (*Ecl.* 2.2)

As regards its narrative structure and plot development, the *Narcissus* is a rather plain text. Anyway, we can notice a certain gradation in the description of the bizarre spectacle in the poem. In the first five lines, notions of youth, beauty, and love neatly combine to depict an almost idyllic scene. However, reading the following lines (6–9), one begins to realize that the harmonious 'reality' represented so far is essentially only illusory, which is what the expression *pictura pascit inani* employed in line 6 insinuates. The rest of the cento (lines 10–16) develops the idea of Narcissus' diseased love[10] stemming from the deceptive illusion implied above – that is, Narcissus' own alluring, but elusive water reflection, which is actually both self-alienating and self-constitutive, as will be discussed later in this paper. The youth is no longer untroubled by the dangers of love (*securus amorum* – line 5); on the contrary, he becomes a betrayed lover (*vana spe lusit amantem* – line 14) because, paradoxically enough, he has forgotten about himself (*oblitusve sui est* – line 11). This ignorance of Narcissus (*ignarus imagine gaudet* – line 12), which means that he can easily be deluded, ultimately leads to his self-destruction.

At the beginning of the cento, there are several expressions that may assume a premonitory tone, namely the Virgilian units *fontes sacros* (*Ecl.* 1.52), *insigni laude* (*Aen.* 1.625), and *insignis facie* (*Aen.* 9.583) redeployed in lines 3–4. The point is that both of the adjectives occurring in the quoted units have broad semantic scope; the meanings of *sacer* range from "sacred" to "execrable",[11] and

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10   On the perception of love as a disease in ancient culture and literature, see, e.g., WINKLER, JOHN J. 1991. „The Constraints of Eros." In FARAONE, CHRISTOPHER A. – OBBINK, DIRK [EDS.]. *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion.* New York: Oxford University Press, 222f.; and FARAONE, CHRISTOPHER A. 1999. „If *Erōs* Is a Disease, Then Erotic Magic Is a Curse." In *Ancient Greek Love Magic.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 43ff.

11   GLARE, P. G. W. [ED.]. 1976. *Oxford Latin Dictionary.* Vol. 2. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1674. Actually, the adjective *sacer* also occurs in negative senses in Virgil – see *auri sacra fames*

insignis stands for "remarkable" or "distinguished", in both positive and negative senses of the words.[12] Thus, whereas in their original settings the examined phrases are positively charged, in the context of the story about Narcissus, depending on the interpretative strategy one adopts, this particular choice of Virgilian words may become negatively laden, and may therefore suggest ideas of Narcissus' eventual downfall, the reason for which is to be sought in the accursed fountain (*fons sacer*), of his unwanted glory (*insignis laus*),[13] and his ill-famed beauty (*insignis facies*). In essence, the analyzed Virgilian units may acquire double significance in the cento.

The general absurdity of the Narcissus myth is intensified by a couple of oxymorons present in the cento, neither of which is of Virgilian provenance.[14] Inherent contradictions are embedded in the imagery of lines 6–7 (*atque animum pictura pascit inani,* [*Aen.* 1.464] */ expleri mentem nequit ardescitque tuendo* [*Aen.* 1.713]) and lines 13–14 (*ilicet ignis edax* [*Aen.* 2.758] *secreti ad fluminis undas* [*Aen.* 3.389] */ ipsius in vultu* [*Georg.* 1.452] *vana spe lusit amantem* [*Aen.* 1.352]).[15] In the first case, the effective juxtaposition of the logically incompatible terms *inani* and *expleri* is further enhanced by the following phrase *ardescitque tuendo*, which is a part of an enjambment[16] (line 8 supplies the deferred object of the preceding gerund and concretizes the previously mentioned "inane picture": *egregium forma iuvenem,* [*Aen.* 6.861] *quem nympha crearat* [*Aen.* 10.551]). The whole passage thus seems to convey a sense of suspense and has a faint climactic effect. Whether it was an intention on the part of the centonist or not, the latter

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(*Aen.* 3.57), *sacer ignis* (*Georg.* 3.566), and perhaps *tum demum horrisono stridentes cardine sacrae / panduntur portae* (*Aen.* 6.573–574).

12   SOUTER, ALEXANDER ET AL. [EDS.]. 1968. *Oxford Latin Dictionary.* Vol. 1. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 924f. In the corpus of Virgil's poetry, I have not found any obvious use of the adjective *insignis* in its negative sense.

13   The Virgilian unit *insigni laude ferebat* (*Aen.* 1.625) can thus be understood as a latent, albeit a bit awkward, oxymoron.

14   Cf. note 13 above. Apart from the mentioned trope, there are some more embellishments that are available for use in poetic discourse present in the *Narcissus*. For example, an anaphora (*sic*) is included in line 9, which the author, however, appropriates as a whole from Virgil. Further, the language of the cento is replete with various sound effects, some of which (approximately half of them) were created or at least amplified by the centonist. We can observe instances of alliteration, consonance, and assonance – see especially *adsidue veniebat: ibi haec caelestia dona* (2); *fontes sacros insigni* (3); *intentos volvens oculos, securus amorum* (5); *pictura pascit* (6); *mentem nequit ardescitque tuendo* (7); *egregium forma iuvenem, quem nympha crearat* (8); *dorso dum pendet* (10); *et membra decora iuventae / miratur rerumque ignarus imagine gaudet. / ilicet ignis edax* (11–13); *ipsius in vultu vana* (14); and *collo dare brachia circum / ter conatus erat nec, quid speraret, habebat* (15–16).

15   Cf. S. MCGILL (2005: 78f.), who debates the cited passages of the *Narcissus* in the context of its extra-Virgilian intertextuality.

16   Nearly half of the sixteen verses of the *Narcissus* are enjambed lines. The poetic device in question is frequently adopted in order to create and consequently satisfy readers' expectations by delaying the meaning of a line of verse; this effect is most notable in lines 7, 11, 13, and 15 of the cento.

of the oxymoronic passages quoted above appears to echo the former; the over-lapping semantic fields of *inani* and *vana* are conspicuous, and the inchoative verb *ardescit* may have a partial counterpart in *ignis edax* occurring in the latter oxymoron, which makes use of the traditional opposition between fire (*ignis*) and water (*ad fluminis undas*). These two antithetical elements occur side by side in the Narcissus cento and embody a logical paradox; water that is normally supposed to extinguish fire becomes an agent that starts the youth's love fire and continually nourishes its flames.[17] In light of this, the employment of the metaphor *longumque bibebat amorem* (*Aen.* 1.749)[18] in line 4 of the *Narcissus* is particularly pointed; the unit can be understood both literally (remember that in Ovid's version of the myth Narcissus actually wanted to quench his thirst in the pool [*Met.* 3.415–416]) and figuratively, establishing a connection between the notions of water (both water and the beloved water reflection may serve as the object of the imperfect *bibebat*[19]) and love (*amor*), which recurs later in the poem, namely in the second of the analyzed oxymorons.

As far as the Virgilian texture is concerned, the most significant generative prin-ciple, or driving force, detectable behind the composition of the *Narcissus* is the motif of *imago*. This term, even though it is explicitly mentioned only once (see line 12 of the poem), appears to have functioned as a trigger word for the author in centonizing Virgil.[20] Actually, as observed by McGill,[21] the word in question occurs in the original context of several of the Virgilian *membra* employed in the *Narcissus*, specifically of those used in lines 5 (*Aen.* 1.350) and 14 (*Aen.* 1.352), line 9 (*Aen.* 3.490), and lines 15–16 (*Aen.* 2.792 or 6.700). The Virgilian *imagines* that the cento 'invokes' are the following: the *inhumati ... imago / coniugis* (*Aen.* 1.353–354) denoting the ghost of Dido's late husband Sychaeus, who appears to the queen to reveal her brother's *factum que diu celavit* (*Aen.* 1.351) – that is,

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17   Furthermore, water, or more specifically, Narcissus' reflection in the water, constitutes not only the source of the young man's burning love, but also the ultimate, albeit indirect, cause of his death, which makes the role that this element assumes in the myth still more ambiva-lent and absurd.

18   On the history of this particular metaphor, see S. McGill (2005: 200, note 35).

19   Notice that, in addition to the verb *bibere* (line 4), the centonist also uses the verb *pascere* (line 6) and the adjective *edax* (line 13). All the listed terms have one common semantic feature (seme), namely that of */consumption/*. The register of the poem therefore perfectly agrees with the scene described; the discussed vocabulary accentuates the notion of Narcis-sus' devouring self-love.

20   S. McGill (2005: 16f.) refers to such verbal cues as "covert keywords".

21   S. McGill (2005: 77f.), who also mentions several other keywords, both overt and covert, that are behind the centonist's selection of individual Virgilian units. It deserves to be re-marked that the covert *fulgentibus armis*, which, according to S. McGill (2005: 77), links the two *membra* employed in line 8 of the cento (*egregium forma iuvenem,* [*Aen.* 6.861] *quem nympha crearat* [*Aen.* 10.551]) because it occurs in both *Aen.* 6.861 (*egregium forma iuvenem et fulgentibus armis*) and *Aen.* 10.550 (*Tarquitus exultans contra fulgentibus armis*), may also suggest *Aen.* 12.275 (*egregium forma iuvenem et fulgentibus armis*) as the source of the first unit redeployed.

Pygmalion's murder of Dido's spouse, and his deceitful behaviour (*multa malus simulans* [*Aen.* 1.352]);[22] the *Astyanactis imago* (*Aen.* 3.489), a circumlocution that in Andromache's speech refers to Ascanius; the ghost of Creusa (*Aen.* 2.793), Aeneas' deceased wife, whom the Trojan prince encounters on his way back to Troy in search of his beloved; and, last but not least, the ghost of Anchises (*Aen.* 6.701), Aeneas' father, whom the hero meets in the underworld.

Furthermore, in several other cases, the *imago*-theme serves as a general setting for the Virgilian scenes that the centonist makes use of. Both line 6 (*Aen.* 1.495 and 1.464) and line 12 (*Aen.* 8.730) of the *Narcissus* come from relatively lengthy passages of the *Aeneid* (1.453–495 and 8.608–731) that portray Aeneas' fascination with images of famous historical events. In *Aeneid* 1, the Trojan hero is captivated by a large mural on Juno's temple, where scenes from the Trojan War are depicted;[23] in *Aeneid* 8, the object inspiring Aeneas' enchantment is his newly forged shield, on which Vulcan represented the future glory of the Romans.

Lastly, the first Virgilian unit (*Aen.* 6.861) employed in line 8 of the cento had originally referred to one of the *imagines* sawn by Aeneas on his visit to Hades, namely the younger Marcellus, and the *membra decora iuventae* (*Aen.* 4.559) in line 11 had originally characterized Mercury appearing to Aeneas as a kind of *imago* to remind him of his duty. As we have seen, the *imago*-context, whether it describes prophetlike spirits of the dead or pieces of art, unobtrusively permeates the *Narcissus* as a whole, giving emphasis to what becomes its central theme – the *imago* as the object of Narcissus' obsessive love and its spectacular, dream-like, and insubstantial nature.[24]

Another intriguing subtext of the cento lies hidden in the verse fragments adopted from *Eclogue* 2, which occur at the beginning (line 2 – *Ecl.* 2.4) and at the very end of the *Narcissus* (line 16 – *Ecl.* 2.2), thus constituting a sort of frame for the whole narrative. The second of Virgil's pastoral poems portrays the unrequited love of the shepherd Corydon for the fair youth Alexis. A general correspondence between the Virgilian subject matter – that is, the story of Corydon's unfulfilled homoerotic desire,[25] and the description of Narcissus' despairing self-love, an example of homoeroticism, or rather autoeroticism, par excellence, given in the cento is easy to notice.[26] The parallels that one is implicitly invited

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22   Remember that notions of simulation and deception are, as pointed out above, implicitly embedded in the Narcissus story as a whole; the examined Virgilian context therefore acquires further significance.

23   The allusion to this particular passage of the *Aeneid* makes the belief expressed by R. LAMACCHIA (1984: 735), namely that the predominance of verbs in the imperfect tense in the *Narcissus* "può far pensare alla descrizione di una pittura parietale", still more thought-provoking.

24   Cf. S. MCGILL (2005: 78).

25   On the notions of sexuality in Virgil's poetry, see, e.g., OLIENSIS, ELLEN. 1997. „Sons and lovers: sexuality and gender in Virgil's poetry." In MARTINDALE, CHARLES [ED.]. *The Cambridge companion to Virgil*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 294–311.

26   There are several other tragic 'love stories' that the intertextual links between the cento and Virgil bring to mind: Dido's love for her departed husband Sychaeus (see lines 5 and 14 of

to draw between the two men, both surrounded by natural scenery and pining for their unavailable lovers, increase the allusive potential of the whole Virgilian cento, which can consequently be viewed as an amplification or a reworking of Virgil's pastoral story of unsatisfied love.[27] Some readers can also understand the discussed twofold signification of the patchwork poem as an overall comment on the lonely and hopeless fate of everyone whose love is doomed to failure because of the beloved's indifference or, as with Narcissus, by reason of the beloved's illusionary existence. Besides, the location of the unit taken from *Eclogue* 2 at the beginning of the cento may take on additional significance; a recollection of the unsuccessful outcome of Corydon's love enterprise may serve as a fore-shadowing of the unhappy ending of the Narcissus story, which is referred to by the laconic, albeit pathetic, expression *nec, quid speraret, habebat* (line 16) appropriated from one and the same *Eclogue* (2.2). Although the intention of the centonist in selecting lines from *Eclogue* 2 inevitably remains a question mark, the Virgilian background story indisputably enriches the semantics of the cento, at least for an attentive reader.

There is one more quality of the *Narcissus* to be inquired into, namely its non-Virgilian intertextuality, which means the poem's allusions to other extant treatments of the Narcissus myth. The version of the Narcissus story followed by the anonymous author of the cento seems to be the famous epyllion by Ovid (*Met.* 3.339–510)[28] rather than any peculiar Greek treatment.[29] Readers can notice a few factual similarities between the cento and Ovid. First, Narcissus' beloved is referred to by a periphrasis that describes him as a young man of extraordinary beauty *quem nympha crearat* (line 8; cf. *Met.* 3.344–346); second, it was pre-

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the cento), her growing affection for Aeneas (lines 4 and 7), Andromache's love for her son Astyanax (line 9), the strong ties of friendship between Nisus and Euryalus (line 10), Aeneas' relationship with his wife Creusa (lines 13 and 15–16) or possibly with his father Anchises (lines 15–16), and his planned marriage with Lavinia (line 5). Nevertheless, neither of them seems to coincide with the tale of Narcissus to such an extent as the story of Corydon's torments of love does. Actually, only the lifelong relationship between the two heroes, Nisus and Euryalus, who finally die together, similarly to Narcissus and his insubstantial 'twin', shows closer resemblance to the story narrated in the cento.

27   Cf. also *Ecl.* 2.25–27: *nec sum adeo informis nuper me in litore vidi, / cum placidum ventis staret mare non ego Daphnim / iudice te metuam, si numquam fallit imago.* The point is that the idea of Corydon's beauty as reflected in water and the notion of the potential deceptive-ness of such an image appear in close proximity to each other in the quoted lines, which, when recalled, further accentuates the parallelism between the shepherd and the mythologi-cal hero. Besides, *Eclogue* 2 is also alluded to in the Narcissus story by Ovid (see especially *Met.* 3.463: *iste ego sum! sensi nec me mea fallit imago*), which, as will be demonstrated, represents another direct source of the cento.

28   On the contrary, F. ERMINI (1909: 43) says that "sebbene i versi siano vergiliani, forse l'imitazione è dal greco." However, Ermini does not provide any evidence to support his supposition.

29   On various versions of the myth, see, e.g., EITREM, S. 1935. Sub voce „Narkissos." In WIS-SOVA, GEORG – KROLL, WILHELM [EDS.]. *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Alter-tumswissenschaft.* Vol. 16. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1723ff.

sumably thirst that brought the hero to the treacherous fountain, which is what the metaphorical phrase *longumque bibebat amorem* (line 4; cf. *Met.* 3.413–417) may imply; last, both the centonist and Ovid mention the nondivisible unity of Narcissus and his elusive beloved, whether in love (line 10 of the cento: *his[30] amor unus erat* [*Aen.* 9.182]) or in death (*Met.* 3.473: *nunc duo concordes anima moriemur in una*). The listed minute details can be viewed as pieces of information intentionally provided by the centonist in order to suggest Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as one of the poem's direct models.

    Moreover, a number of verbal parallels between the patchwork text and the epyllion are observable.[31] One can be found in the depiction of what we may call the 'drinking/love scene'; line 4, *insignis facie* (*Aen.* 9.583) *longumque bibebat amorem* (*Aen.* 1.749), echoes Ovid's *bibit* and *amat*, and the concomitant motif of Narcissus' beauty in *Met.* 3.415–417:

    dum que sitim sedare cupit, sitis altera crevit,
    dum que bibit, visae conreptus imagine formae
    spem sine corpore amat, …

Further, lines 5–7 of the cento,
    intentos volvens oculos, (*Aen.* 7.251) securus amorum. (*Aen.* 1.350)
    dum stupet (*Aen.* 1.495) atque animum pictura pascit inani, (*Aen.* 1.464)
    expleri mentem nequit ardescitque tuendo (*Aen.* 1.713),

seem to allude to *Met.* 3.439–440: *spectat inexpleto mendacem lumine formam / per que oculos perit ipse suos …* Apart from two close verbal similarities between the quoted passages (*expleri nequit*/*inexpleto* and *oculos*), one notices a strong semantic resemblance that the expression *pictura inani* bears to the phrase *mendacem formam* and particular emphasis that is in both scenes placed on perception, specifically on the act of seeing (*volvens oculos, stupet, tuendo*/*spectat lumine, perque oculos perit*). Similarly, lines 11–12 of the *Narcissus*, *et membra decora iuventae* (*Aen.* 4.559) / *miratur* (*Aen.* 8.730), echo *Met.* 3.422–424:

    … decus que
    oris et in niveo mixtum candore ruborem
    cuncta que miratur, …

Here the intertextual links between the cento and Ovid consist in the words *decora*/*decus* and *miratur*. Last but not least, lines 15–16 of the cento, *collo dare brachia circum* (*Aen.* 2.792 or 6.700) / *ter conatus* (*Aen.* 2.792 or 6.700) *erat* (*Aen.* 6.32) *nec, quid speraret, habebat* (*Ecl.* 2.2), are reminiscent of *Met.* 3.389: *ibat, ut iniceret sperato bracchia collo*. The allusion to Ovid is extensive in this case;

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30   I agree with S. MCGILL (2005: 200, note 31), who supposes that the pronoun *his* in the quoted line refers to Narcissus and his image in the water, rather than with K. SCHENKL (1888: 534), who supposes the pronoun to be a reference to nymphs.

31   Cf. the list supplied by S. MCGILL (2005: 79), to which I have added two more particular instances, namely the second and the fourth of the examples given below.

the verbal parallels are the following: *collo*, *bra(c)chia*, and *speraret/sperato*. However, the agents of the described actions are actually different – Narcissus in the cento and the nymph Echo in Ovid. Since there is no explicit mention of Echo in the patchwork text, the centonist may have wanted to allude to the role she plays in Ovid's story at least in this way. Anyway, considering the brevity of the *Narcissus*, both the quantity and the quality of its Ovidian echoes are striking and demonstrate the complexity of the cento.

In addition to the analyzed cento, the *Codex Salmasianus* of the *Anthologia Latina* includes seven other handlings of the Narcissus myth (*AL* 26, 134, 135, 136, 210, 259, and 260 SB[32]). Interestingly, there are three couplets among the listed poems whose imagery, as McGill observes,[33] employs the antithesis between *aqua* and *ignis* that occurs in the cento: *invenit proprios mediis in fontibus ignes / et sua deceptum urit imago virum* (*AL* 134 SB); *ardet amore sui flagrans Narcis<sus> in undis, / cum modo perspicua se speculatur aqua* (*AL* 135 SB); *se Narcissus amat captus lenonibus undis; / cui si tollis aquas, non est ubi saeviat ignis* (*AL* 210 SB). Besides, notions of the two opposite and mutually exclusive elements are also present in Pentadius' ten-line poem about Narcissus (*AL* 259 SB)[34] – water in the first and fire in the second of the following couplets (lines 3–6):

> se puer ipse videt, patrem dum quaerit in amne,
> perspicuoque lacu se puer ipse videt.
> quod Dryas igne calet, puer hunc inridet amorem
> nec putat esse decus, quod Dryas igne calet.

It is not clear whether we may in this case talk about intentional imitation on the part of the centonist or the authors of the other quoted poems contained in the *Anthologia Latina*.[35] Anyway, it is worth noting that the paradox inherently embedded in the Narcissus story essentially encourages – or rather urges – poets to use appropriate tropes such as oxymorons or paradoxes in their treatments of the theme.[36]

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[32]   SHACKLETON BAILEY, DAVID R. [ED.]. 1982. *Anthologia Latina I: Carmina in Codicibus Scripta. Fasc. 1: Libri Salmasiani Aliorumque Carmina.* Stuttgart: Teubner.

[33]   S. MCGILL (2005: 78).

[34]   The poem is noteworthy especially because of the verse technique applied; Pentadius uses so-called *versus echoici* or *serpentini*, in which the end of the pentameter 'echoes' the beginning of the preceding hexameter.

[35]   S. MCGILL (2005: 78) suggests that the examined oxymoron "may have been part of the storehouse of elements of a late antique African branch of the Narcissus story." For further instances of the *ignis*/*aqua* oxymoron in late antique poetry, see S. MCGILL (2005: 200, note 34).

[36]   See *AL* 260 SB, a quatrain on the Narcissus myth listed above, which ends with *ut per quas periit crescere possit aquas*. Multiple oxymorons and paradoxes are also embedded in Ovid's version of the myth (*Met.* 3.339–510) – see, e.g., *vocalis nymphe, quae nec reticere loquenti / nec prius ipsa loqui didicit, resonabilis Echo* (3.357–358); *... fuit in tenera tam dura superbia forma* (3.354); *dum que sitim sedare cupit, sitis altera crevit* (3.415); *cuncta que miratur,*

The intricate imagery and the echoes of Ovid employed in the cento, as well as the most significant allusions to Virgil that enrich the verses of the *Narcissus* with subtle nuances and new dimensions, have been analyzed. Let us now see what further implications the disclosed structure of the poem may have. The multi-level intertextuality of the piece highlights its classicizing style and adds prominence to the imitative pursuit of the centonist, who exploits his *fontes sacros* (i.e. his 'sacred' sources) to the full.[37] The leitmotif of the Narcissus myth that is most pervasive in the cento is the *imago* conceit, which the centonist both explicitly introduces and implicitly alludes to. Thanks to the Virgilian and Ovidian texture of the *Narcissus*, the *imago* acquires several characteristic features in this poem, which itself can be understood as a 'specular image' of its classical models. The *imago* of Narcissus is presented as an intangible, iconic object, something nourished from without, and therefore devoid of any inherent substance; in one sense, the same is true of every cento that has its original source outside of itself, in its model text. Further, the *imago* as a fanciful representation of some great original constitutes an object of irresistible, even unhealthy fascination; similarly, the imitative centos arouse readers' interest and curiosity especially because of the intriguing ways they interact with the original source text. Last but not least, the Narcissean *imago* is an elusive and deceptive spectacle, which can, however, sometimes reveal truth (in Ovid,[38] *Met.* 463–464, the hero finally realizes that he has fallen in love with his own reflection; remember also the above-mentioned truth-revealing *imago* of Dido's deceased husband Sychaeus, which the Virgilian texture of the cento recalls); correspondingly, the patchwork poetry is a pretentious enterprise, and the meaning of every cento is owing to its allusive character elusive and ever-receding.

If we pursue this line of argument further, we can reveal the metatextual significance of the *Narcissus*. The examined cento can be interpreted as a general comment on the seemingly antithetical concepts of secondariness and originality that constitute the very cornerstones of the philosophy of the patchwork poetry itself. The point is that the cento poetry is based on a conceptual paradox, as is the Narcissus myth; in terms of subject matter, the cento as an autonomous poetic form appears to dissociate itself from its source, upon which it, however, crucially depends as far as its wording is concerned.[39] Furthermore, as shown above, the

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quibus est mirabilis ipse. / se cupit inprudens et, qui probat, ipse probatur, / dum que petit, petitur pariter que accendit et ardet (3.424–426); *uror amore mei, flammas moveo que fero que. / quid faciam roger, anne rogem quid deinde rogabo / quod cupio, me cum que est in-opem me copia fecit* (3.464–466).

37   Cf. S. McGill (2005: 79), who remarks that the allusive potential of the cento manifests its author's skilfulness.

38   On the notions of illusion and deception in Ovid's treatment of the Narcissus myth, see, e.g., Rosati, Gianpiero. 1976. „Narciso o l'illusione dissolta (Ovidio, *Metam.* III 339–510)." *Maia,* 28, 83–108; or Hardie, Philip. 1988. „Lucretius and the Delusions of Narcissus." *MD,* 20–21, 71–89.

39   The only ancient author who formulated the bizarre cento poetics was Decimus Magnus

semantics of the *Narcissus* is also not absolutely free from Virgilian echoes; rather, the classical hypotext of the cento determines its meaning both positively (in the sense of supplying contextual parallels that add emphasis and overtones to the ideas presented) and negatively (in the sense of sometimes strikingly different referents of individual units in Virgil and in a cento). Essentially, the cento cannot thoroughly liberate itself from its source in any respect; likewise, Narcissus' imaginary beloved is born and dies together with Narcissus himself. The mythological hero is eventually changed into the narcissus flower that commemorates his beauty, along with his tragic fate; correspondingly, Virgil's poetry undergoes a literary metamorphosis into the secondary and second-rate cento, the very existence of which testifies to the renown and excellence of its primary source. In sum, readers who adopt this critical response to the *Narcissus* discover a perfect harmony between its content and its form on a textual as well as a metatextual level.

   In conclusion, a couple of other legitimate and intriguing interpretive strategies that post-structuralist literary theory places at our disposal and that can be adopted in reading the *Narcissus* deserve to be briefly mentioned. Obviously, the disconcerting message of the poem, a seemingly plain narrative of self-love and self-delusion, easily lends itself to a Lacanian interpretation. The portrayal of Narcissus gazing at his evasive and deceptive 'self-portrait' that practically entrances him cannot but remind contemporary readers of Jacques Lacan's concept of the "mirror stage", the earliest phase of ego development, which is characterized by the child's fascination with its own mirror image.[40] Actually, in Lacan's view, this primary, seemingly self-constitutive narcissistic experience is ultimately self-alienating. Therefore, the analogy existing between the self-captivation of the Lacanian infant and the mythological hero's self-enchantment does not need any further clarification.

   The cento plot itself, or more specifically, the antithesis, lying at the root of Narcissus' downfall and reinforced by the oxymorons employed in the cento, between the self and its elusive mirror image (the non-self), or between the original and its inane copy (the non-original), can be conveniently deconstructed in Derridean terms.[41] Neither of the primary concepts is autonomous or self-contained;

Ausonius; in his unique prose letter addressed to the rhetor Axius Paulus and attached as a preface to the *Cento Nuptialis*, the poet characterizes the cento form by means of many oxymorons and paradoxes: *accipe igitur opusculum de inconexis continuum, de diversis unum, de seriis ludicrum, de alieno nostrum* (24–26); *variis de locis sensibusque diversis quaedam carminis structura solidatur* (30–31); *hoc ergo centonis opusculum ut ille ludus tractatur, pari modo sensus diversi ut congruant, adoptiva quae sunt ut cognata videantur, aliena ne interluceant, arcessita ne vim redarguant, densa ne supra modum protuberent, hiulca ne pateant* (52–57). The text of Ausonius' epistle was taken from GREEN, ROGER P. H. [ED.]. 1999. *Decimi Magni Ausonii Opera.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 145ff.

40   On this theory, see LACAN, JACQUES. 1966. „Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je telle qu'elle nous est révélée dans l'expérience psychanalytique." In *Écrits.* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 93–100.

41   For an introduction to the method of deconstruction, see, e.g., NORRIS, CHRISTOPHER. 1982. *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice.* London: Methuen.

on the contrary, their very existence depends on the exclusion of the other, the secondary. In short, notions of the self and the original would be unsubstantial if there were no estranged selves and no imitative representations. The distinctions between the discussed binary oppositions are therefore not such clear-cut ones as they seem. Essentially, without his deceptive self-reflection, the poor young man Narcissus would maybe never have 'known' his own, albeit alienated, self; without countless literary imitations of Virgil, the notion of the poet's originality and renown would inevitably fade away.

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RESUMÉ

Příspěvek rozebírá pozdně latinský vergiliovský cento *Narcissus* (*AL* 9 R), šestnáctiveršovou anonymní báseň, která je jednou z doposud nejméně prozkoumaných centonárních skladeb s mytologickou tematikou, a to navzdory své poměrně důmyslné formální koncepci a významové bohatosti. Po komentáři k celkové kompozici centonu a užitým básnickým prostředkům následuje analýza signifikantních intertextových vztahů dotyčné skladby k jejímu zdrojovému textu, přičemž se jako hlavní ‚generativní princip' rozebíraných veršů ukazuje termín *imago*. Kromě samotného Vergilia je v této souvislosti zkoumáno také Ovidiovo epyllion o Narkissovi (*Met.* 3.339–510), které představuje další přímý pramen centonu. Autorka se dále vyjadřuje k podobnostem mezi centonem a skladbami pojednávajícími o Narkissovi, které jsou rovněž obsaženy v souboru *Anthologia Latina*. Na závěr jsou specifikovány metatextové roviny básně, jakož i její dvě poststrukturalistické interpretace. Autorka stručně naznačuje, v jakém smyslu je dílko možno uvést do souvztažnosti s lacanovskou koncepcí nejranější vývojové fáze lidského ega a jakým způsobem jej lze podrobit derridovské dekonstrukci.