

NARCISSUS (339–510)

Tiresias was not a member of Cadmus' family, and his sorrows at first have no connection with those of the Theban monarchy. Similarly, Narcissus, though a Boeotian, has no direct relationship with Thebes or Cadmus. Our narrator seems to have forgotten his announced subject and strayed off on idle material. However, in this substantial and carefully organized story, Ovid continues to explore his principal themes. Narcissus illustrates significant aspects of human sexuality and the danger of not understanding it; he frustrates desires, which his beauty rouses, and spurns love of others, male or female, which might have flourished, and he is left with futile self-love that inevitably proves suicidal. His discovery of himself, because of his prior snubbing of others, cannot lead to personal development, only to doom. Accordingly, in the narrative, the circumstances of self-knowledge become shaped like the events that brought Actaeon and Cadmus to misery. Narcissus experiences, apparently for the first time, the vision of

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himself—and it is fatal, predicted so from the start by Tiresias. Moreover, he sees this fatal sight in a pool of an inviolate forest area. Like Actaeon, he must die, victim not of a violated deity, but of himself.

We possess no other extended narration about Narcissus, and, although some people argue that much of Ovid's achievement should be credited to a lost Hellenistic source, there is no evidence whatsoever for such material. Moreover, Ovid has woven into the myth of Narcissus, fool in love with his reflection, the tale of Echo, the nymph whose every verbal response depends on echoing (e.g., reflecting) the words of others. Ovid treats these two as opposites, Narcissus totally preoccupied with himself and Echo pathetically preoccupied with others, and he forces them into a doomed relationship. Echo falls in love with the boy and yet must vainly try to pursue her love in terms of his loveless words. She responds passionately to words that he speaks with no interest in her, and she misinterprets his passionless sentences, from which she is permitted to echo only final words or syllables, as invitations to love. When she follows up her misinterpretation, and he spurns her, the rejection desolates her, and her body wastes away, leaving her nothing but a forlorn, helpless echo as we know the phenomenon. As Ovid presents the story of Echo, we tend to sympathize with her and view her as a victim of heartless, selfish Narcissus. However, she is also a victim of her own defective nature. Unable to be a complete person, forced to wait for others to speak first before she can utter a word—and then only according to the last words spoken by the other—Echo can never experience the mutuality of love, the ideal toward which Ovid's amatory theme in Book 3 points. But selflessness makes a stronger appeal than selfishness, and Ovid shows Echo, even after suffering rejection, capable of sympathizing with and pitying the fate of selfish Narcissus.

Once he has narrated the scorning and metamorphosis of Echo and set up expectation of the merited punishment of Narcissus, Ovid moves into the second phase of his story. Narcissus, tired hunter, comes to an inviolate spot with a clear pool: he is like both Actaeon and Diana in situation, and so Ovid makes him play a double role as the mysterious power whose being may not be safely seen (or known) and the sacrilegious intruder and spectator. Narcissus views his reflection in the pool and falls fatally in love with it and himself. Ovid develops the delusion of Narcissus, his false perception of the reflection as an other person, his crazy efforts to conduct a conversation with the image in the water. In contrast to Echo, he generates all the words and gestures in this imaginary relationship. Although at first he interprets the exact repetition of his movements of body and mouth as proof that this "other person" responds to him, eventually he realizes that the reflection is nothing but an echo of himself, devoid of body,

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feelings, and any existence that would provide him mutuality. Since for Narcissus, then, there can be nothing lovable apart from himself—and no gratification in this frustrating self-love—he can only waste away. He leaves a pretty but insignificant flower on earth as his physical memorial, and his vapid soul descends to the Underworld clothed in an airy version of his human beauty, which he persists in vainly admiring as it is reflected from the waters of the Styx. He is a victim of his own defective nature, at the opposite extreme from Echo. Love that proves to be nothing but self-love, that seeks self-gratification without true perception of another, is doomed. Self-centered beauty sooner or later dies, flawed in its humanity and deprived of lasting happiness.

Narcissus and Echo (339–401)

339–
40 *ille*: Tiresias, whose new-found fame as prophet provides the transition to this new story. *Aonios*: Boeotian; Ovid used the adjective once earlier at 1.313. *inreprehensa* 340: Ovid invents this word, along the lines of other Augustan neologisms, which negate a past participle. Its prominent position in the line and the sound-patterns that it initiates give a flashy epigrammatic quality to this transition.

341–
44 *prima*: nominative, framing the clause with its proper noun *Liriope*. *fide*: as indicated by *vocisque*, with which it is linked, this is genitive singular. It is an archaic form that Ovid uses to avoid normally trisyllabic *fidei*. *vocisque ratae*: "powerful prediction"; literally, the voice that proved true. *temptamina*: another poetic neologism, first used here, then again at 7.734 and 13.19. Evidently, the narrative tone has changed from the jesting manner of Jupiter with Juno. *caerulea* 342: a parallel poetic form to *caerulea*. The two adjectives have the same meaning, and their usage depends on metrical considerations. Nominative singular feminine. *caerulea* has too many short syllables for the hexameter. Ovid is the first to name Liriope as mother of Narcissus; he may have based the name on flower-associations. It evokes a Greek word for lily, *flumine curvo / inplucuit*: in this and the following clause. Ovid suggests an erotic picture of a river that curves its waters, like arms, around the struggling nymph. The Cephisos flows into western Boeotia from the mountains of Phocis. Thus, the story of Narcissus takes place closer to Delphi than to Thebes. The first epithet Ovid uses for his hero is *Cephisius* at 351. *vim tulit* 344: this dactylic unit, followed by a complete stop, denotes perpetration of rape. It next occurs at 4.239. Ovid has another phrase, *vim parat* (cf. 2.576), which covers attempted rape that does not always succeed.

344– Raped nymphs have become commonplace in the poem by now, and

- 46 we would expect Liriope to get pregnant, so Ovid can hurry forward to the birth of the child. *pulcherrima*: seems a gratuitous and ironic detail at the time of birth, but the nymph's beauty explains the lovability of her baby: he is beautiful, too. *nymphe* 345: some early scribes changed the Greek nominative to Latin *a*, but the meter, an emphatic sequence of four spondees, requires long *e*. As the story begins, the narrator acts as though love can inhere simply in physical beauty. It ends on a quite different note. The naming of Narcissus pretty much concludes Liriope's role.
- 346–
48 *de quo consultus*: Ovid goes back to Tiresias and links him briefly to Narcissus. We may assume that the mother Liriope consulted the seer, but the narrator does not actually say so. *esset . . . visurus*: separation of the two verbal units enables Ovid to shape 347 like a Golden Line and lend it solemnity. It is no accident that he uses a verb of seeing here. Narcissus will see a fatal vision long before he reaches a natural old age. *fatidicus vates* 348: Ovid reuses a solemn epic phrase from *Aen.* 8.340, where a prophetic unambiguously predicted the greatness of Aeneas' descendants. Tiresias' prophecy, on the other hand, baffles people, and it strikes us at first as a trivial inversion of the Delphic injunction to know oneself. In Greek moral thinking, as Plato's Socrates emphasizes, self-knowledge is the prerequisite of an ethical life, the most important goal for human beings. Self-knowledge enables us both to act in reasonable conformity with our true natures and to make intelligent changes in ourselves. Tiresias declares that self-knowledge will shorten Narcissus' life. How is that possible? The clue lies in the implicit meaning of "knowledge" in Tiresias' prophecy. Narcissus will not "know" anything more profound than that the figure he sees in the water is the reflection of himself. That discovery does kill him, granted, but it is not the self-knowledge that Delphi and moral philosophers meant. If he had arrived at Socratic self-knowledge or worked his way to it after this frustration, Narcissus could have led a useful, significant existence, even one that brought him love.
- 349–
50 The narrator sounds as though he is merely interested in developing a tale that proves the reliability of Tiresias. *exitus*: ambiguous here. The first meaning would simply be the outcome of events, but that leads to the second meaning: the outcome in connection with Narcissus is his strange madness and death (cf. 350). To explain those intriguing matters, the story then can explore Narcissus's life in considerable detail.
- 351–
52 *ter ad quinos*: that is, *annos*. Since *quindecim* almost never fitted into the hexameter, and Ovid did not want to try equally awkward *sedecim*, he creates an addition problem for us: $(3 \times 5) + 1 = 16$. Narcissus had reached his early teens, when some young men are equally attractive to males and females.

- 353–
55 For this wooing topos in Ovid, cf. note on 1.478. Catullus in his Epithalamium, 62.42 ff., seems to have created the anaphora formula that Ovid uses here. He had men argue from the analogy of a pretty flower, which is desirable only so long as it is in bloom, that young girls should yield to love. Ovid turns most cases of wooing into rejection. There is always a sensible answer to the impetuous selfishness of "Gather ye roses while ye may." Narcissus, however, is not sensible: he proves more selfish than those who desire his beauty. The careful balance between 353 and 355 is significantly interrupted by the parenthetical comment in 354, which explains the boy's nonresponsiveness as due to arrogance. The adjectives of 354 create an antithesis: hardness in Narcissus' personality negates the allure of his soft young beauty. The dichotomy, which Ovid will work out in the split between body and reflection, has been noted as of now. *superbia* 354: even worse but equally doomed with *fiducia formae* (cf. Semele at 270).
- 356–
58 The narrator has gone from pluperfect in 351–52 through perfect in 353–55, completing his sketch of the relevant background, and now he moves into the present. He introduces Echo, who falls in love with Narcissus under the typical amatory opportunity of a hunt. *agitantem . . . cervos*: we have just watched Actaeon driving deer, then himself being hunted down and killed as a deer. *vocalis* 357: before he names Echo, the poet introduces her dominant characteristic, her voice, and then explores its parameters. *nec . . . didicit*: since it is hardly a matter of "learning" to do these things but rather of having the capacity, we might have expected *potuit* or *poterat* (cf. 361, *posset*). The prefixes *re-*, occurring at the same metrical position in 357 and 358, both point to the basically responsive personality of Echo. *resonabilis*: Ovid has coined this word here as the definitive epithet to go with the name.
- 359–
61 *non vox erat*: after the earlier *vocalis*, this may seem puzzling. What is meant is that Echo was not *simply* a voice, not yet. The narrator points up the difference between the Echo of his initial story and Echo of our experience (and of later stages of the story, after 399 ff.). *usum . . . oris* 360: wide hyperbaton. *garrula*: Echo suffers a basic frustration. She has a passionate compulsion to communicate her feelings, but is hampered by being dependent on others' words. *verba novissima* 361: the longest response given in this story consists of four words (cf. 500), extending slightly more than a half-line.
- 362–
65 Echo has lost the capacity to initiate speech and conversation because Juno has punished her for what, to the goddess, was misuse of that ability. The nymph distracted the jealous deity with her chatter, deliberately babbling on so as to give her friends time to escape Juno's anger. *deprendere*: earlier, in 3.6, the narrator used this verb to ask who could catch Jupiter in the act. Juno always blames the girls for

- Jupiter's amours, so here she aims to catch them. *sub Iove . . . suo* 363: until the reflexive adjective is added, after a pause, we might think that Juno merely means "out in the open under the sky" with the colloquial *sub Iove*. In fact, the phrase means that the nymphs literally lie "under Jupiter," in sexual intercourse. *prudens* 364: the deliberate plan of Echo sets up the *dum*-clause with subjunctive in 365.
- 365–69 Ovid doubles his clauses as Juno menaces *linguae . . . potestas* 366 and *vocis . . . usus* 367. The adjectives *parva* and *brevissimus* refer to the drastic limitations on Echo's power of speech. In the *tamen*-clause of 368–69, the slight possibilities are once again reviewed, in new terms. *in fine loquendi* 368: i.e., the final words spoken by others. *ingeminat . . . reportat* 369: these terms for repeating, echoing frame the line significantly.
- 370–72 *ergo*: resumptive, taking us back to the hunting scene at 356–57. *per devia rura*: remote, pathless stretches of the countryside provide standard locales for hunts (cf. 226–27). *vidit et incaluit* 371: the second verb adds a key new detail to the scene at 356: Echo grows hot with desire. Same words in 2.574 to describe the passion of Neptune (which, in his case, led to attempted rape). *sequitur vestigia*: the language suggests that Echo hunts the hunter. *quoque* 372: = *et quo*; ablative of degree of difference. *flamma propiore*: as the metaphorical "flame" that heats Echo's desires, Narcissus increases her passion (quite unconsciously) in proportion as she gets closer.
- 373–74 Ovid explicates his metaphor with a humble simile about firebrands. The elaborate opening by a double negative (*non aliter quam* instead of simple *ut*) leads to false expectation of epic dignity in the comparison. As with Echo, brands are brought ever nearer to the flame until (unlike her) they actually ignite. *summis circumlita taedis*: "smeared around the tops of torches." (They resemble huge matches.) *vivacia* 374: Bömer argues that this is a formulaic epithet that Ovid has clumsily borrowed from Vergil and the epic tradition. It seems better to take the adjective in connection with the image: the "lively" feature of sulphur is its sudden combustibility.
- 375–78 The poet briefly characterizes the frustration of this lover who cannot speak out her love spontaneously. *blandis . . . dictis*: ablative of manner (her words) or dative with the compound verb (his words that Echo vainly longed to respond to). Sweet words form Narcissus would liberate her love. *molles . . . preces* 376: more lover's talk, "soft requests" for affection. *natura repugnat*: a battle here rages between the will and the physical constraints of Echo's speech. *nec sinit, incipiat* 377: *sino* takes the subjunctive with or without *ut. quod sinit*: parenthetical clause, more commonly in prose rendered *id quod. sonos. ad quos sua verba remittat* 378: literally, "sounds to which she might echo back her own words." Subjunctive in relative clause of purpose.

- It is partly true that Echo responds with "her own words," in that, though she only repeats what another has said (and only the final part of the speech), she impresses on them a special meaning.
- 379–82 Separated from his companions, Narcissus might be vulnerable to attack, as Actaeon proved to be. Ovid starts off this episode with pluperfect in the first two lines, then moves into the present as he focuses on Narcissus' puzzlement over the echo. His question in 380 arises from a desire to locate his friends. In the chiasmic ordering of the line, Ovid appropriately juxtaposes the hunter's query and the shortened form of Echo's repetition, which constitutes a reply. We can easily imagine how she converts the neutral question into her own feeling response. We are not to consider a multiple echo reverberating from many points in the landscape, but a single clear "response," from nearby, to judge from what Ovid said about the close pursuit by Echo. Narcissus, then, imagines that the echo is the free communication of an independent person (as he will later misinterpret the reflection in the pool to be the free response of a separate individual). *vocat illa vocantem* 382: instead of mechanically reproducing the exact words of each echo, the poet devises various clever methods of alluding to them. Here, he does not repeat *veni*, but conveys the special intention of Echo: whereas Narcissus looks for someone indefinite to tell him where his path lies, she specifically calls Narcissus for love.
- 383–84 *nullo veniente*: ablative absolute. *quid . . . me fugis?*: because nobody appears after his previous command, Narcissus impatiently assumes that the speaker avoids him and asks why. With the very same words, again indirectly conveyed to us in 384, Echo speaks out her longing passion. When later confronted with his reflection, to which he mistakenly assigns personality, Narcissus will speak much the same words, but with a hopeless longing similar to Echo's here (cf. 455–56 and 477–78).
- 385–89 *alternae . . . imagine vocis*: a circumlocution for the echo-effect, but Ovid so phrases it as to suggest by the visual term *imago* a connection between an echo and a reflection. That helps to link the two phrases of Narcissus' story. *coeamus* 386: Ovid exploits the difference between "getting together," merely to make a casual acquaintance, and uniting in sexual intercourse (cf. above 324). The first person plural liberates Echo to act optimistically on her response. *verbis favet ipsa suis* 388: in "favoring her own words," Echo happily acts upon them. *silva*: ablative of place from which. In the later story of Procris, when she lovingly moves through the underbrush in the woods to embrace Cephalus, he mistakes the sound for that of a wild animal and kills her. So Ovid recounts it in *Ars Am.* 3.731 ff. *iniceret sperato brachia collo* 389: these words have an unmistakably erotic meaning and indicate the intention of Echo. However, in the only previous use of

inocere brachia + dative. Ovid was describing the hostile attack in l. 184 of the monstrous children of Earth on Olympus. Thus, what Echo means as a loving approach could be construed by a cold egoist like Narcissus as disgusting belligerence, an assault on his person! Echo, however, thinking that because of her own biased use of his words she has been invited to love, suffers terrible shock from his repulse.

- 390–
92 *ille fugit*: Ovid used the same words in identical metrical position at 228 to describe the vain flight of another hunter, Actaeon. The word order of 391 may be simplified as follows: *emoriar antequam sit*. Translate *emoriar* as future indicative; it is a strong assertion of intended action. *sit tibi copia nostri*: Fränkel called special attention to the importance of this clause in Ovid's story. Whereas Narcissus is so intent on denying himself to others that he proclaims his determination to die rather than giving Echo access to himself, she freely offers herself without reservation to him. By dropping the two opening words of Narcissus' outcry, which subordinate the clause (essentially negating it) to his death-wish, Echo converts the anticipatory subjunctive to a jussive, a genuine invitation to love to which he, in arrogant coldness, cannot accede.
- 393–
95 *spretā*: Ovid sketches out the main features of humiliation that result from spurned love. Ashamed, Echo hides herself from all contact with people (393–94). However, her frustrated love torments her even more painfully.
- 396–
99 *corpus . . . curae*: of this alliterative pair, the agonized feelings take priority and cause the body to undergo the metamorphosis that eventually eliminates it. The nymph Echo decomposes into nothing but a voice, the familiar bodiless echo (still endowed with love for vain Narcissus). *tenuant*: sleeplessness wears her down. *adducitque cutem macies* 397: she becomes gaunt and wrinkled. *sucus / corporis* 398: her vital juices evaporate. When nothing remains but voice and bones, these separate from each other, bones turning into stone (a reversal of the change of l. 398 ff.) and voice alone surviving to represent Echo's troubled personality. *vox manet* 399: at this point she becomes the echo the narrator and audience know (cf. 359–60).
- 400–
401 *inde latet silvis*: virtual repetition of the first hemistich of 393. Echo hides and is no longer seen, because she no longer possesses a visible body. By contrast, she is universally heard: her entire identity inheres in her voice. *omnibus* 402: dative of agent with passive verb, common in Latin poetry.

Narcissus and His Reflection (402–510)

- 402–
3 In his transition, Ovid notes that Narcissus had frustrated not only Echo but all potential lovers of either sex. *luserat* 403: not a sympathetic word for Narcissus' behavior. *coetus . . . viriles*: the tricolon

ends on the group that will continue the narration. A young man calls down divine punishment on the proud spurner. *coetus* has no independent existence from *coitus* nor a separate meaning; the orthography depends entirely on the metrical need for a long syllable that the diphthong provides. Thus, we should think back to 386–87 and translate "sexual relations with men," not "masses of men."

- 404–
6 *aliquis*: Ovid has a rejected male curse Narcissus for two reasons: (1) he wants to keep Echo sympathetic and come back to her at the close, showing her still loving and able to generate a warm response from the youth's selfish words; (2) he perceives that when Narcissus falls in love with his own reflection, he loves a male; which would better justify a male's curse than a female's. Guillaume de Lorris, in his *Roman de la Rose*, greatly simplifies his Ovidian imitation and has Echo, a fine French lady, curse Narcissus with her dying breath, with the result that he falls in love with his reflection—de Lorris then omits Ovid's elaborate analysis of that love—and quickly dies. *manus . . . ad aethera tollens*: standard prayer gesture. *sic . . . sic* 405: careful echo of the anaphora in 402–3, to set up poetic justice. *amet . . . amato*: significant disposition to heighten antithesis. *precibus . . . iustis* 406: dative with compound verb. The narrator inserts his bias against Narcissus with the adjective *Rhamnusia*; Themis or Nemesis, the Greek goddess of divine punishment, had a famous shrine at Rhamnos near Athens.
- 407–
10 Ovid abruptly moves into an epiphastic description of an idyllic, unviolated, "virginal" forest pool (407–12). It has the typical start (*fons erat*) and the demonstrative close (*hic*) at 413. Except for the adjective *argenteus*, he characterizes the pool and its location entirely in negatives: no mud, leaf, animal, human being, or even sunray has "touched" it. *inlimis*: the pool's first adjective is coined for this passage. It never recurs in Latin. Although it adds a touch of poetic appeal to the remarkably clear water of this spring, it initiates the negatives that end by making the pool an appropriate symbol of Narcissus' personal negativity. The description of Diana's pool at 155 ff. differs noticeably. *aliudve pecus* 409: since she-goats have been listed in 408, this noun includes billy goats and sheep, as well as other barnyard animals.
- 411–
12 The attractive grassy approach to the spring occurred in Diana's pool also (cf. 162). *sole . . . nullo* 412: the description ends on the negative note, instead of positively talking of cool shade. *passura*: future participle in present sense, used to fit the meter easily.
- 413–
14 *et studio venandi lassus et aestu*: Ovid propels us once again into the formulaic setting of the tired hunter, probably at high noon. A strange kind of "violence" will occur here. *procubuit* 414: he fell forward to get a drink. *faciemque*: although a general word for appearance, this

- alliterative word prepares for the form that will appear as a reflection in the pool (cf. 416).
- 415–
17 *sitis altera*: the metaphorical use of thirst in love poetry was well established. Lucilius used thirsty Tantalus as a paradigm of sexual frustration, as Horace used him to define the foolish miser (*Sat.* 1.1.68). As Bömer notes, Ovid varies the metrical stress on the two different types of thirst here. *conreptus imagine formae* 416: while leaning forward to drink, Narcissus sees and becomes caught up with desire for his reflection. Ovid repeats these words in 4.676 to describe the violent onset of Perseus' love for Andromeda. If he failed to make clear in 416 what Narcissus saw, he ends any doubts in the verbosity of 417. *spem . . . amat* 417: reminiscent of the hopeless passion of Echo at 389. She tried to put hope into her echo; he imagines hope in his reflection. This time, frustration will arise not from the pride of the beloved but from physical absence.
- 418–
19 *adstupet ipse sibi*: Narcissus epitomizes the self-frustration that Ovid has repeatedly studied in the poem. The verb here renders the stunning effect of love at first sight, but, in order to capture the reflexive feature of this passion, the poet invents the compound form (with dative). Ovid also suggests by his choice of language that this love, which fulfills the curse, (cf. 405) constitutes, as elsewhere, a metamorphosis of the lover. Narcissus becomes trapped and motionless by the pool, a statue reflected. Romans used statues for this very purpose, as garden-planners do today. Some of the richer houses of Pompeii and the pool in front of the Serapeum at Hadrian's Villa provide good examples of Roman taste. The simile implies the lifeless beauty that Ovid sees in this whole story.
- 420–
21 *humi positus*: Ovid clarifies the stance of his figure for future artistic representations (such as the famous one of Caravaggio): Narcissus crouches where he has been drinking, thus leans over the water and creates the reflection. *geminum . . . sidus*: a good example of a metaphor interrupted by the apposition that explicates it. *dignos . . . crines* 421: Narcissus possesses fair long hair, as the youthful gods Bacchus and Apollo did in artistic representations. Now that Bacchus has been born, Ovid inserts a favorable reference to him at the first opportunity.
- 422–
24 *inpubesque*: at sixteen, Narcissus was hardly below the age of puberty; but the adjective had an extended meaning of "youthful," and here with the noun would mean "beardless." *eburnea*: Ovid uses this adjective of parts of the body that are "white as ivory." *decusque / oris*: "his handsome face." *mixtum candore ruborem*: the narrator talks of the general complexion of the boy and his reflection, an ideal blending of red and white, what we today sometimes call "a healthy pink." The same three words will recur in slightly different syntax at 491.

- to register the loss of that complexion. *candore*: ablative of place where, omitting *in*. *cunctaque miratur* 424: after the chosen details of 420–23, the narrator can afford to generalize. *quibus*: ablative of specification. *mirabilis ipse*: the repetition, the apparent distinction between object and subject, makes the mirror effect and the paradoxical experience of Narcissus graphic. There will be much repetition of this type.
- 425–
26 In the four hemistichs of these lines, Ovid uses three different structures to present the reflection paradox: verb and reflexive pronoun, active and passive forms of same verb, active and intransitive forms of synonymous verbs. Even when he repeats his use of active and passive, he varies the grammar: using a relative clause first, then a subordinate *dum*-clause. The alliteration of 426 begins to imply that the narrator plays with the situation he has devised, with no sympathy with Narcissus.
- 427–
29 *fallaci . . . fonti*: he thought he was kissing a human face but, deceived by the reflection, he merely touched the water. For 428–29, the complex word order implies the awkward, frustrated effort. The order could be made more prosaic and perspicuous as follows: *quotiens in mediis aquis brachia mersit captantia collum visum*. In addition to attempting a kiss, the lover is trying to embrace the neck. Although Narcissus would have ruined the reflection by plunging his arms into the water, the narrator does not utilize that detail here; later, at 475 ff., it will serve his purposes well.
- 430–
31 *quid videat, nescit*: so far, he has not fulfilled the fatal prophecy of self-knowledge (cf. 348). *quod vider*: relative clause placed, as often, before its antecedent, this time to force the balance with the first clause and entertain the audience by the varied syntax. *qui decipit incitat error* 431: the doubling and ambivalence demands Narcissus' investigation.
- 432–
33 Now the narrator, as though impatient and eager to clear up the confusion, apostrophizes Narcissus. Not that Narcissus is able to hear him across the fictional and temporal barrier. But the speech emphasizes the reality of the reflection, the vanity of the image, for our benefit, to distance us farther from this lover. *simulacra fugacia captas*: reusing the verb of 428, Ovid changes the earlier object (which was the physical neck) to insubstantial image. It will take the boy until 463 to understand this. *quod petis* 433: clarification of the paradox of 426. *quod amas, avertere, perdes*: Ovid compresses the grammatical syntax, in order to force three verbs into juxtaposition and suggest the speed with which, by a slight movement, the boy could destroy his beloved (rather emphatically dismissed as lifeless by the neuter *quod*). The first and third verbs make good sense together; the second

- verb is a parenthetical imperative, where we would expect perhaps a condition (*si averteris*) or gerund (*avertendo*), neither of which would have fitted so neatly into the metrical line.
- 434–
36 *repercussae . . . imaginis umbra*: “the shadow or phantom of a reflected image.” *nil habet ista sui* 435: a new perspective on the confusion caused by the reflection. Whereas before Ovid played with the reflexive opportunities of the reflection, e.g., that Narcissus kept seeing and seeking himself, deluded that it was another; now the alienated narrator argues that, as an entity generated from and identical with the boy (*ista*), it has no substance of its own, no reflexive feature. *venitque manetque*: note the distinction in tenses, which, in 436, will be extended to a distinction of moods. If Narcissus left, his reflection would quietly disappear—if only he could bring himself to leave.
- 437–
39 The apostrophe having accomplished nothing, the narrator continues in the third person. He starts off with anaphora and alliteration, to establish the fanatic quality of this devotion: it distracts the lover from food and robs him of sleep. He will waste away, if he goes on like this. *opaca fusus in herba* 438: whether this is a new stance (vs. 420) is not clear, but it is more precise. *mendacem . . . formam* 439: Ovid insists, with the philosophic tradition, that mere form lies. That is especially true here, where form is nothing but reflection of form.
- 440–
41 *perque oculos perit*: the alliteration helps to call attention to the strange way of dying, not simply *because of* the eyes, but actually *out through* the eyes. *paulumque levatus*: since he had been sprawling face downward on the ground, staring at the pool, Narcissus has to raise himself in order to carry out the histrionic gesture toward the trees, to enlist nonhuman nature on his side. Since he himself has been inhuman and suffers the penalty for that, he gets little sympathy from us. And of course the trees do not respond.
- 442–
43 *io*: an interjection that connotes a loud cry to someone. *crudelius . . . amavit*: although “cruel love” is a familiar theme to Ovid and his audience, it normally applied to love that was actively, not passively, cruel. The unkind or heartless lover gets branded as “cruel.” Cf. 1.617, 2.612, and (in the later words of Narcissus) 3.477. Probably, then, we are to sense the irony of the usage here and, rejecting his self-pity but remembering Echo, to classify Narcissus with other cruel lovers. *latebra opportuna* 443: the woods provide a convenient place for love. In the poem, however, the kind of love that has taken place in that locale has been primarily rape. Thus, the trees to which Narcissus appeals have indeed seen a great deal of “cruel love,” much crueler than this.
- 444–
45 *tot agantur saecula*: literally, “so many centuries have been passed (of your existence).” Ovid turns into a passive structure an active phrase, *agere saecula*, that Propertius coined in 2.2.16 on analogy

- with the conventional *agere aetatem*. Narcissus simply means: “since you are so many centuries old.” *tabuerit* 445: perfect subjunctive in relative clause of characteristic. Again, the selfish boy expects to generate pity by his rhetorical question and hear: “Nobody; you are uniquely pitiable.” We have just watched his victim Echo waste away, so he cannot get from the inanimate woods or us the answer he wants.
- 446–
47 Chiasitic ordering of the paired words on either side of the caesura in 446. *placet* 446: that is, *mihi*. Narcissus likes what he sees, but he cannot make contact. *quod*: as in 430, the neuter subtly alludes to what he does not recognize, that the reflection is nonhuman. Here, the personal pronoun *quem* would easily have fitted. *tantus . . . amantem* 447: a terminal sententia, like that in 1.60, occupying the second hemistich. The narrator has called attention to the *error* in much the same terms at 431, but without wasting any paths.
- 448–
50 *quoque*: = *et quo*, introducing relative clause of purpose. Narcissus’ self-pity now focuses on a common topic of love elegy, namely, lovers’ separation. Normally, there is a geographical separation of great distance between frustrated lovers, when, for example, the girl goes off with a rival or the man to fight wars. At the minimum, a house door or a wall parts the lovers. None of those conventional obstacles exists here. *exigua prohibemur aqua* 450: “we are kept [from each other] by a tiny film of water.” *cupit ipse teneri*: “he obviously wants me to embrace him.” Narcissus continues to personify the reflection, to treat it as a separate being.
- 451–
53 The statement of 450 is now justified. *quotiens . . . totiens*: he draws false conclusions from the mirror effect. Although he means he tries to kiss that other boy, Ovid makes him say what in fact he does: he kisses the water! *resupino ore*: as Narcissus leans down to kiss the water, he sees the reflection strain to meet his lips, mouth up and head tilted back at the same angle that his is. *putes* 453: the speaker has forgotten his imaginary audience of trees (cf. 442 ff.) and now seems to address each one of us or anyone who will pity him. Subjunctive in incomplete unreal clause. *amantibus*: plural, because Narcissus infers from the reflection that “it” feels the same as he does. So they are mutual lovers, both frustrated.
- 454–
56 Now he turns to the water and addresses the reflection itself. *huc exi*: this imperative resembles *veni* at 382, which Echo tried to turn into a lover’s appeal. Narcissus wants the beloved to “come out” of the water. *unice*: as Bömer notes, this adjective does not appear in the erotic vocabulary of Ovid or other love poets. It does not, then, have the conventional associations of modern “one and only.” The vocative implies that Narcissus regards this form as the only *puer* he would familiarly address. And Ovid chooses it for its obvious irony: this deceived lover treats as unique what is only a double of himself.

- petitus* 455: the verb has already been used at 426 in an amatory sense. *abis*: unless Narcissus has made a move back from the water, he cannot have seen his reflection doing that either. *quam fugias* 456: subjunctive in relative clause of characteristic after negative antecedent. *et amarunt . . . nymphae*: using the nymphs to prove his lovability, Narcissus unconsciously reminds us of his transgressions against others' love. He deserves to experience rejection.
- 457–*spem . . . nescio quam*: Echo had vain hopes, too (cf. 389). *promittis*:
58 Narcissus sees “promises” where of course there are none from another, only his own vain desires and interested looks. The corresponding verbs of 458 describe what we know is the mirror effect, reflection, which the lover interprets as spontaneous response. *ultra*: a fatal illusion, not an observed fact. As long as Narcissus can attribute an independent personality and series of free actions to this shape, it remains a possible love object.
- 459–Repeated verbs in corresponding clauses allow Ovid to lay out the
62 lover's delusion. *adrides*: “response” to laughter. *me lacrimante* 460: ablative absolute does not define the logical connection with the surrounding context. However, Narcissus infers from the simultaneity of identical tears that his tears cause the “other” to cry. *motu . . . oris* 461: the lover becomes a lip-reader of his reflection, which of course moves its lips as he does. This line slows down with four spondees. *formosi*: the standard word in Roman elegy for lovable beauty. Here, its basic sense reminds us that the reflection and its mouth are nothing but empty forms. *verba refers* 462: a reminder of Echo? She responded to his words, but not as he meant them; now he imagines a sympathetic response where there is none.
- 463–Significantly, the moment he reminds us of Echo and verbal response,
64 the curse becomes fulfilled. *iste ego sum*: “I an what I have been calling ‘you’.” Here the divided being(s) resolve themselves into the single Narcissus, as he realizes the truth of the reflection and the cruel fact about himself, which also fulfills Tiresias' original prediction. *nec me . . . fallit imago*: a sharp distinction from what he said at 454. Using the fire metaphor in 464, he verbalizes his understanding of the situation the narrator objectively described in 426. *mei* 464: nice use of the objective genitive, distinguished from the meaning of *meo*.
- 465–*quid faciam?* Ovid has the desperate lover lay out his problem in the
66 familiar rhetorical form of a dilemma. Cf. Actaeon at 204 ff. *roger anne rogem?* Translate with the active verb first: “woo or be wooed?” It is likely that Ovid changed the order for metrical reasons. Deliberative subjunctive. *quid deinde rogabo?* No sooner has he shaped his difficulty as a dilemma than Narcissus must discard it as invalid. There are not two separate people or two independent actions from which he can choose. *quod cupio, mecum est* 466: the third word should be

- rendered very literally; “what I yearn for, I have right here *with me*.” These words, spoken under other circumstances, would be a happy declaration that one's fondest desires have been achieved. Picking up on that ambiguity, Ovid has Narcissus articulate his condition in language that recalls his earlier rejection of Echo: *ante emoriar quam sit tibi copia nostri* (392). Having sworn he would die rather than give himself to her, Narcissus finds himself in total possession of himself—and so miserable that he will die. *inopem me copia fecit*: Ovid correctly exploits the related etymologies of adjective and noun. The noun derives from an abandoned archaic adjective, *co-ops*, meaning “abundant.” Wealth has paradoxically made him poor, because in acquiring the reflection, he has lost a viable lover. This is a poor version of the self-knowledge that Delphi and Socrates advocated, but it is all that limited Narcissus can muster.
- 467–As the first human lover that Ovid has presented, Narcissus finds
68 himself in a paradigmatic state of hopelessness, doomed to defeat by the conditions of his being. It is typical of such lovers to express the vain wish—“if only . . .”—with the hopes that these conditions be altered. In 467, then, he wishes to separate himself from his body, that is, to create two individuals out of the present one and so make mutual love possible for himself. That wish will be granted in quite a different fashion: he will die and be permanently disconnected from his physical being, which in turn will be lost as a human body. *votum . . . novum* 468: ever the self-conscious lover, Narcissus calls attention to his unique desire. By definition, it might be said, lovers always desire to be together, to die together in times of danger. (Cf. his complaints in 455–56.) Here he wants the opposite.
- 469–Abandoning these verbal conceits before they become too much for
70 us, Narcissus faces approaching death. The *dolor* that was mentioned at 448, and the wasting away, first noted at 437 ff., have taken their toll. *primoque extinguo in aevo* 470: a rare use of first person passive of this verb; Ovid has appropriated this whole clause from his *Her.* 8.121. In referring to the boy's premature death, it uses a metaphor that links the snuffing of the light of life and of the flame of love.
- 471–In the final lines of this soliloquy, which began at 442, Narcissus still
73 cannot abandon his fixation on there being two separate individuals. Note the careful structure of 471, divided at the caesura into two corresponding halves. *posituro*: dative depending on *mihi*. Death is no severe burden since he will get rid of his severer pains. On the one hand, he imagines himself as released. But on the other hand, there is *hic qui diligitur*; and for that person he would like to have a long life! As it is, the two of them will end up united in death *anima in una* (473). In putting things that way, Ovid lets the boy trivialize the love language of mutual lovers and also that of close friends who,

- as Horace shows us, could call each other "half of their soul." Cf. Horace of Vergil, *animae dimidium meae* (C. 1.3.8), and Maecenas, *te meae partem animae* (C. 2.17.5).
- 474–76 *male sanus*: the narrator has resumed control of the story, and he immediately produces a more objective evaluation of this young fool. *male* is a common poetic alternative for *non* or the negative prefix *in-*, and is often chosen for metrical reasons. Here, Ovid especially aimed for five dactyls and narrative speed after the slow self-pity of Narcissus' speech. *turbavit aquas* 475: this is the first time that Ovid has taken advantage of his opportunity to describe the effect on Narcissus of seeing the reflection disappear or be disturbed. He could have done it earlier, for instance, when the boy kissed the water (cf. 451) or when he was weeping over the pool (cf. 459–60).
- 476–79 It is evident that Narcissus' self-realization lasted only a short time, before he sank back into his delusion about the separate existence of the reflection. Here he passionately apostrophizes the vanishing form, in much the way he addressed it in 454–55. It is a cruel beloved who heartlessly forsakes his lover! *tangere non est* 478: *est* + *infin.* = *licet* or, as here, "it is possible." Cf. 453, where Ovid writes *posse tangi*, using the passive. Narcissus at least knows now that it is impossible to touch the reflected form; he asks only to be allowed to look at it. *miserio . . . furori* 479: aware of the madness that confirms the narrator's foreshadowing at the start (cf. 350), he invites our pity with the adjective. Like an addict, he seeks to "feed" his mad addiction, aware but out of control.
- 480–81 *dumique*: = *et dum*. A casual transition from direct speech by the boy back to narrative. *doleri*: the pain of hopeless love (cf. 471, 452) rather than of physical sickness. *summa . . . ab ora*: from the top edge. Ripping one's robe from top to bottom is a standard gesture of despair among Greeks and Romans. Proserpina will rip her dress as she is kidnapped by Pluto in 5.398. The immediate result of Narcissus' gesture is that his comely chest is bared, and the poet can launch into his Golden Line at 481 (enhanced by alliteration) over the next gesture, beating the breast. *marmoreis* 481: earlier, the boy had been compared to a statue of Parian marble (cf. 419).
- 482–85 *pectora . . . percussa*: careful repetition from 481, in chiasmic order. *roseum . . . ruborem*: together with the marble-white hands, this composes a scene mixing red and white, a favorite Ovidian combination (cf. 422–23). The simile of 483–85 introduces two types of fruit, apples and grapes, which, before reaching ripeness, appear of mixed colors or purplish. That is the color of his bruised skin, and the reference to immaturity points to the premature death of this young man. *parte / parte* 483–84: both ablative of specification, chiasmically

- disposed. *variis . . . racemis*: the grape clusters show a variety of colors.
- 486–87 *quae*: the chest (pectora 481) being beaten. *liquefacta rursus*: the participle is ablative with *unda*. Ovid derives a unique meaning from the verb, which regularly means "turn into liquid." What he intends to convey is that, after having been disturbed and nonreflecting (cf. 475–76), the pool, once again clear, becomes able to reflect the boy's image. He extends the sense of *lique-* by analogy with adjective *liquidus* and verb *liquesco*, both of which carry connotations of being clear and transparent. *non tulit ulterius* 487: this language regularly applies to violent indignation, but here denotes the intolerable agony of Narcissus' special *furor*.
- 487–90 A second simile helps to convey the rapid disintegration of the lover. Wax melts near fire or a flame; morning frost melts away in the sunshine. Similarly, under the burning effect of the internal fire of hopeless passion, Narcissus wastes away. *intabescere*: cf. *tabuerit* (445). *attenuatus* 489: Ovid reminds us of the way Echo earlier was weakened (cf. 396). The fates of these two become linked again as both prove victims of futile passion.
- 491–93 In 491, the narrator picks up the colorful phrase of 423, only to deny now that it is valid. Dying Narcissus has simply turned pale. One negative after another dismisses elements of his former physical beauty. *visa placebant* 492: cf. 446. *nec corpus remanet* 493: Ovid means that the special body, so desirable in Echo's eyes, had wasted, but some body still survives, until finally at 509 the narrator reports its complete disappearance. Now, he carefully brings Echo back, taking his cue from the relative clause, in order to contrast her other-directed love with the self-fixated passion of Narcissus.
- 494–96 *quae*: nominative; the relative immediately picks up from the name of Echo. *quamvis*: limits the two adjectives that follow in the line; *indoluit* (495) is an independent verb. She has greater reason to suffer and to resent her suffering, because it was caused by the person she loved, yet she grieves *for him*. *miserabilis* 495: perhaps the narrator now concedes that Narcissus is pitiable, but I prefer to think he is emphasizing Echo's impressionable feelings. *eheu*: whereas Narcissus emotes in self-pity, Echo takes and transforms his speech, injecting it with her own feelings of loving sympathy. *resonis . . . vocibus* 496: reverting to the echo effect, Ovid reminds us of the epithet he coined for her at 358, this time coining the adjective *resonus*.
- 497–98 Ovid describes another gesture of grief and despair, which Narcissus used: he beat his upper arms with his hands; cf. 4.138. In echoing that sound, which is wordless, Echo should have had some trouble, inasmuch as she had no arms to beat.

- 499–*solitam . . . spectantis in undam*: Narcissus is still staring into the
 501 pool as he utters his last words. Soon, however, it will be a different
 body of water that he sees; cf. 505 below. *heu frustra dilecte puer*
 500: again, we judge the words differently according to who is speak-
 ing them. *dictoque vale* 501: ablative absolute, the second word, of
 course, being indeclinable. *vale inquit et Echo*: since scansion of the
 first *vale* is short, long, Ovid has to do something special with the
 second *vale* here; he scans it short, short. This is a rare but permissible
 shortening in hiatus (rather than using elision). Ovid ingeniously imi-
 tates Vergil's *Ecl.* 3.79, but adds the echo situation. Thus, where
 Vergil had the effect of a repeated "Farewell" seemingly die out, Ovid
 has the echo, dying out, imply the death of Narcissus.
- 502–*caput . . . submisit in herba*: since he was sprawled on the grass,
 3 staring into the water, Narcissus merely slumps to the earth in death.
domini mirantia formam 503: self-admiration and self-delusion con-
 tinue right up to the moment of death (cf. 424).
- 504–*se . . . spectabat*: Ovid does not explain how the incorporeal being
 7 could look at himself. We can hypothesize that Narcissus went down
 to the Underworld with an *umbra*, which would have a visible form
 though no physical substance. In theory, that could produce its own
 reflection in the Styx. In any case, this mirroring of insubstantiality
 compounds the folly of the boy. He is even less sympathetic in death
 than in life. *planxere*: a basic mourning gesture is beating the breast.
 Ovid will repeat this verb twice in 507, at the beginning (with the
 more familiar form of perfect 3rd person plural) and the caesura.
sorores / naides 506–7: since Narcissus' father was Cephisos, the
 water-nymphs whom he sired would be the boy's sisters. Cutting hair
 for women was another act of mourning. At 507, Echo again seems
 to violate her verbal limitations and echo a physical blow that would
 logically require her to have a body to beat (cf. above 497–98).
- 508–*In the trisected* 508, Ovid lists three items for a funeral. The most
 10 important item, however, is lacking: there is no body. *croceum florem*
 509: the narcissus replaces the dead boy. As Ovid describes it, it has
 white petals around a deep yellow center and much resembles the
 daffodil (to which its species is closely related). Not a significantly
 lovely flower, merely pretty. Narcissus' metamorphosis is an
 anticlimax.