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Writ in Water: Seeing Time in Ovid's Narcissus Episode^{*}

Andrew Feldherr

- 1 There is a striking difference between Ovid's now familiar version of the Narcissus myth and the nearly contemporary summary by the mythographer Konon. According to Konon, the beautiful Narcissus, 'a scorner of Eros' drives a suitor, Ameinias, to suicide by rejecting him.¹ This would-be lover begs the god to avenge him. 'Narcissus beholds his face and form reflected in the water of a spring, and in strange fashion becomes his own first and only lover. Finally, at a loss and thinking that he suffered a just return for his contempt for Ameinias' love, he perishes.' If there is some moment in which this Narcissus comes to realize that the image he sees is his own, it is never mentioned; the only explicit recognition in the narrative involves his past behavior. In Ovid's version the opposite is the case. Narcissus never realizes that his death is a punishment for his rejection of other lovers but is overcome by the moment in which he recognizes his reflection as the object of his desire.² Thus the evolution sometimes posited in the myth, from a 'naïve' Narcissus who wastes away from love at the sight of his own beauty to a 'self-conscious' Narcissus, aware that he sees himself, is itself reflected in the myth's 'Ovidian' version, the turning point of which is precisely Narcissus' apprehension of himself as the source of the image.³ Whether or not Ovid invented this new twist in the myth,⁴ he certainly primes his reader to look out for this moment of self-recognition in the narrative through the riddle by which Tiresias anticipates his story: Narcissus is destined to reach old age 'if he does not know himself' (*si se non noverit*, 3.348).⁵
- 2 Among the effects of this addition are not only to introduce an intellectual component to Narcissus' erotic experience, nor indeed to complicate the moral dimensions of the tale, but to extend Narcissus' recognition outward from the narrative to incorporate Ovid's readers, who can recognize themselves engaged in a parallel process of recognizing Narcissus. Even before Tiresias' warning is fulfilled in surprising form, when Narcissus' recognition of himself in his reflected image prompts him to echo the question that called forth the prophet's response (*nec tempora vitae longa meae superant*,

3.469–70~*tempora maturae visurus longa senectae*, 3.347), these words in the mouth of such a quintessentially tragic figure may suggest those moments in tragedy when the character's recognition of himself elides the difference between what he knows and what the audience has known all along. Thus the youth's confrontation with his own beautiful form (*formosi ... oris*, 3.461) recapitulates the tragic form which Aristotle describes as most beautiful (*kallistê*, *Poet.* 11=1452a), where the protagonist's change of condition corresponds with a recognition.⁶ So too, the youth's cry of '*iste ego sum*' (3.463) resembles the terms in which Aristotle describes the shared pleasure that all humans by nature take from mimesis, the reckoning that 'this is that man' (*houtos ekeinos*, *Poet.* 4=1448b). Without insisting that Narcissus' words allude to Aristotle's aesthetic theory—indeed the striking difference that results from replacing Aristotle's third-person deictics with the first-person *ego* and the second-person *iste* means that Narcissus takes pain, not pleasure, from the experience—two further aspects of his situation make him particularly comparable to the Aristotelian Everyman of the *Poetics*. First, Aristotle's example of the intellectual processes set in motion by the mimetic arts specifically describes people looking at visual images like the ones that confront Narcissus (*tas eikonas horôntes*). Second, Aristotle claims that this pleasure is natural because it is experienced already in childhood (*ek paidôn*), and, as I shall emphasize throughout this paper, Narcissus himself is poised just at the edge of boyhood (3.352). If it is the case that Aristotle's 'children' lack the philosopher's understanding of why they enjoy mimesis, then we may infer that their own experience of it may be subject to the same dawning of self-consciousness that forms the climax of Ovid's narrative.

- 3 Philip Hardie has well described how at this moment of collapse and confrontation between Narcissus' perspective and the audience's 'the surface of the pool is also the interface between reality and illusion for those outside the text' (2002, 147). Ovid's audience too is subject to the unselfconscious desire for those images to constitute reality while simultaneously recognizing that they do not.⁷ The surface in this respect also becomes the interface between temporal stages in Narcissus' own story, indeed in his brief life, the innocence of youth and the experience that comes with maturity. These tensions between reality and illusion and youth and maturity are brought together in Narcissus' response to his image, which, paradoxically, provokes both the onset of desire and the realization that its object is unattainable. It is specifically this temporal aspect of the recognition communicated between Narcissus and the reader that will be my subject, and I will treat it not as an epiphenomenon of the narrative's concern with desire but rather as a theme to which its erotic effects lend emphasis.
- 4 Time, however, is not just to be recognized as a motif within Ovid's narrative. As, in Hardie's view, desire comes with recognition in the story so I want to show that the audience's consciousness of how they recognize Narcissus also results from their attention to mechanisms of representation which both depend on and reveal the effects of temporality. Ovid's account of Narcissus itself features both verbal narratives of Narcissus' life (especially the *vates* Tiresias' proleptic one) and visual images, both of which are available as self-referential models for the poem's mimesis of Narcissus. These media both show time differently, as emerges from the contrast between static images and linear narratives, and reveal the different temporal perspectives available on the represented events, an ability to see them whole by looking back on them from after and an absorption into the perspectives of viewers and characters who experience them as they unfold in time.⁸ The way Narcissus' life takes on a before and after thanks to the *peripeteia* by which a viewer innocent of the nature of images acquires

consciousness of them reveals how a similar awareness redoubles the audience's possible perspectives on the narrative. The readers' undergoing what Narcissus undergoes as he makes a discovery about what he sees provides the fullest measure of their identification with Narcissus as their mere recognition of what Narcissus' comes to recognize pulls them apart. They of course know before he does what he will discover, that the image he sees is his own. This distinction in temporal perspective which juxtaposes seeing with Narcissus alongside of seeing him may in fact be a part of what they recognize about their recognition and in this way too becomes a mirror image of the discovery of time in the narrative.

- 5 My discussion will have five stages. The first traces the significance of time as an explicit concern in the episode and its manifestation through relationships between sight and sound. The second demonstrates how Ovid's complex construction of his own narrative as something to be heard and seen reproduces the terms of that dichotomy and connects it to the experiences available to his own audience. The third illustrates how the temporal aspects of desire revealed in the narrative complement the Oedipal frame established in its introduction (and conversely how that frame emphasizes the relationship between love and time). Next, I analyze how the tension between words and images in the episode defines its connections to the Dionysiac themes of the surrounding stories. The final section locates Ovid's treatment of the story within a larger dialogue between visual and verbal representation, facilitated in part by evocations of tragedy in Roman painting, and suggests the thematic payoff for combining these ways of perceiving Narcissus.

I. Sight and Sound

- 6 If the readers' recognition of Narcissus resembles' what the youth himself undergoes, they also find a foil in another internal audience who do not see Narcissus' discovery and as a result may fail to recognize him: after his Naiad sisters have prepared Narcissus' funeral pyre, they find not his body but only a 'yellow flower in place of a body' (*croceum pro corpore florem*, 3.509). It is nowhere made clear whether they perceive that this flower is Narcissus (as I discuss below, it is never named), nor, since no metamorphosis is described, does the narrative allow the reader to recognize that body with certainty in the flower that substitutes for it.
- 7 In their lack of awareness of what really happens to Narcissus, the nymphs who conclude the story by lamenting his death themselves mirror a contrast between ignorance and knowledge also present at its beginning:

enixa est utero pulcherrima pleno
 infantem nymphe, iam tum qui posset amari,
 Narcissumque vocat. de quo consultus, an esset
 tempora maturae visurus longa senectae,
 fatidicus vates 'si se non noverit' inquit.
 vana diu visa est vox auguris: exitus illam
 resque probat letique genus novitasque furoris. (3.344–50)

'The most beautiful nymph Liriope, bore from full womb an infant, who was already then capable of being loved, and called him Narcissus. When asked whether he was destined to see the long timespan of a mature old age, the fate-speaking prophet declared: 'if he does not know himself'. The seer's voice seemed empty for a long time: but the outcome proved it true, and the manner of Narcissus' death and the strangeness of his passion revealed its meaning'.

- 8 Here another nymph, Liriope, Narcissus' mother, seeks to learn how long her precociously lovable offspring (*iam tum qui posset amari*, 3.345) will endure. She is answered by a figure who knows the whole arc of her son's life, the *fatidicus vates* Tiresias. That exchange both makes explicit the episode's interest in time and makes temporal perspective a factor in interpreting narrative: Ovid's enjambment of Liriope's question in lines 346–7 places *tempora* as the emphatic first word of a golden line. And the comment that the prophet's reply seemed 'empty' for a long time introduces the characteristically tragic irony that results from opposing a divine knowledge of the future communicated through prophets, and shared of course by the audience, to what the characters in a narrative discover only through time.⁹ Ovid extends that dramatic effect to his own readers in a couple of ways. That Tiresias' voice seemed vain for 'a long time' (*diu*) gives the audience's interpretation of the response its own temporal dimension. And their experience mirrors the story itself: Narcissus discovers that an image is empty; they discover the prophet's words are not. In the case of Ovid's readers, this temporal distance is further increased by their knowledge of literary history. For them, a plot sparked by someone not believing Tiresias is one of tragedy's oldest chestnuts, but for the naïve audience of nymphs, as Ovid points out, Tiresias' reputation (*fama*, 3.339) is something new.
- 9 The word *fama* points also to the oxymoronic relationship established between the verbal and the visual in this opening. The visual dimension of the reception of Tiresias' vox, embedded in the verb *visa est*, is accentuated by the use of the same verb just two lines before in Liriope's question to the prophet; *an esset/tempora maturae visurus longa senectae* (3.346–7). This expression too works in a similar way. While units of time can appear as the objects of the verb *videre* in the sense of 'live to see', ¹⁰*tempora* cannot actually be seen. As a complement to the iteration of turns of phrase that describe invisible things as figuratively seen, *fama* will accrue to a blind figure described with the hyper-oral term *fatidicus*, and that *fama*, too, is the key to integrating Narcissus' story within the larger course of Ovid's narrative (cf. 3.512). The beautiful Narcissus, meanwhile, is an *infans*. And the medium is also the message in that line 347 reveals an iconic arrangement of words that can be transferred to the larger ring composition of the narrative, which recalls its beginnings not only through the contrast between sound and vision, but in focusing that sight on a flower, the narcissus, that mirrors the mother Liriope, and imposes a similar visual symmetry on the text: *foliis medium cingentibus albis* (3.510).
- 10 The apparent disassociation between the synchronous effects of vision and how the experience of time is conveyed by sound, which only exists as long as you hear it, may seem to orient us towards a familiar contest between verbal and visual arts. But temporality equally receives attention as the factor that reveals the insufficiency of each mode of reception. The nymphs at both ends of the narrative are held in thrall by visual images that have no narrative connection and whose short duration deceives them: the baby and the flower. Tiresias may be able to see the end of the story with his mind's eye, but his blindness keeps him from experiencing the longing generated by vision itself. Although he knows already how the tragedy will end, it is the nymphs who do the mourning. There is thus a further tension between the kinds of vision made available within and by the narrative. To press Ovid's language further, the seeing of voice, the recognition of the story as itself partaking of the properties of the visual image, contrasts with the ekphrastic brilliance of the scenes to follow, which offer

another way of making voice accessible to the eye. Narrative, ironically, in lying somewhere between these kinds of sight can seem the one thing that cannot be represented. Aristotle's account of tragedy famously ignores its immediate appeals to the senses as song and spectacle, privileging instead the mimetic capacities of plot.¹¹ From this perspective too, Ovid's opposition of voice and sight highlights the suprasensory effects of the story to come as experienced over time.

- 11 The relationship between sound and sight also suggests the difference that temporal aspect makes even at the point where their effects seem to draw closest together. I have already mentioned the tragic irony by which words and statements are revealed to contain two different meanings. This verbal duplicity appears on a smaller scale in the episode's noted attention to double entendres and patterns of echoing.¹² Thus her punishment constrains Echo to attempt her seduction of Narcissus through the repetition of his own words, again with an intent completely different from his. Narcissus' response to her appearance points the connection between this more immediate verbal game and the larger tragic trope: 'may I die before you control me' ('ante', ait, 'emoriari, quam sit tibi copia nostri', 3.391) at once possesses a predictive value its author probably would not intend and itself repeats the substance of Tiresias' prophecy. This emphatic echoing has been treated in turn as a sonic mirror image of the visual reflection whereby what seem to be two different phenomena point to the identity of their referent. But the connection with irony makes clear the importance of time in the former case: the words' true meaning is deferred so that the ambiguity only emerges after the fact. Such verbal incongruities complement Narcissus' misprision of visual signs and, in as much as the irony is revealed at the same moment when he recognizes his image, helps link both phenomena to Narcissus' mortality. And while Narcissus' recognition of himself similarly plays out over time, the emphasis there is on sameness rather than difference. Image and reality are and always were the same: there is only one Narcissus. In that sense the identity between the verbal and the visual only emerges when the image itself appears in language and as part of a narrative. So conversely the fate that superimposes Narcissus' ghost onto his beautiful image was already present from the beginning. By that token, it is seeing language reflected in the visual that reveals the truly superhuman knowledge it contains.
- 12 This intimation of the theory of tragedy again takes us back to the fundamentally tragic message Tiresias' response imposes on the story to follow. The problem this response poses for many readings of the poem is that the prophet's weighty injunction towards self-knowledge seems wasted in the account of such a naïf as Narcissus.¹³ Other scholars have responded by connecting that internal act of recognition with the moral revelations of several philosophical traditions, evoking the Platonic connection between desire and the discovery of the soul's true self in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* (210a–211d) and the Epicurean physics of vision that ultimately teaches the soul's mortality.¹⁴ My emphasis cleaves to the Delphic inspiration of Tiresias' words, the relevance of which to Narcissus' story will be recognized above all at the turning point of the narrative: 'knowing yourself' refers to the awareness that one is mortal and not a god. It entails knowing the ultimate answer in advance to any prophecy you will seek from the god: the inescapability of death. In this sense the message is ultimately about the apprehension of time.¹⁵

II. Word and Image

- 13 The figure of Tiresias, the unseeing seer, returns us again to the audience's recognition of Narcissus. They too, though already knowing how the story will end, are confronted by a visual image which they cannot see because it exists only in words. Tiresias moreover links recognition within the narrative to recognition of recognition itself. In contrast to the diachronic spread of his *fama*, itself depending on the recognition of Narcissus' fate (*cognita res*, 3.511) which provides a chronological frame linking Narcissus' story to the Pentheus episode that concludes the book, Ovid's audience already knows about Tiresias, in part because they already know about Pentheus as well. But this extratextual recognition of the tragic Tiresias is preceded by an intratextual one when, as I mentioned, Narcissus' cry at his recognition of himself reproduces the words of Tiresias, a figure that he may well never have seen or not remember. Indeed, to recall that Narcissus was then an '*infans*' make his eloquence here an index of the time that has elapsed in the narrative between the two explicit iterations of '*tempora*'.
- 14 This internal and external echo of Tiresias, coming at the moment when Narcissus recognizes the source of the visual image that has deceived him, suggests a connection between tragic experience and sensory perception that underlies two important readings of the episode as a metapoetic staging of the effects of Ovid's own text. Thus Hardie contextualizes the tension between presence and illusion within the episode in relation not only to Lucretius' account of sensory phenomena, which possess material reality but convey images that can deceive, but also to the 'Dionysiac Poetics' of tragedy, whose presiding divinity weaves through the narratives of Book 3.¹⁶ Bacchus' paradoxical presence there, in images that are described as deceptive, translates to the dynamics of fiction the enigma conveyed above all in the metatheatrical *Bacchae*, that of experiencing the epiphany of the god through signs that superimpose represented realities on their recognizably fictive function. For Gildenhard and Zissos, the verbal and visual doublings produced by echoes and reflections 'turn this episode into an allegorical commentary on allusion, or, put differently, into a narrative phenomenology of intertextuality'.¹⁷ The revelation of difference in variation exemplified by, for example, Echo's transformation of Narcissus' language (3.380–9) points to the relationship between Oedipus and Narcissus as at once analogical and inverted. For both interpretations, therefore, Narcissus becomes a figure for the reader, and his self-recognition corresponds with, on the one hand, the audience's recognition of the uncanny ability of Ovidian narrative to delude and expose its delusions, and, on the other, the hermeneutic doubleness of textual presences like Oedipus, already a tragic victim of such paradoxical semiotic doubling. I hope to add a further strand to these readings of Narcissus' recognition by looking again at how his representation in the form of narrative is complicated by an apprehension of him as an image, and how the payoff for such a comparison of the verbal and visual is a consciousness of time. This requires initially highlighting distinctions, rather than analogies, between the episode's Lucretian and tragic intertexts and between Dionysus, the tragic figure most recognizable in Hardie's account of Narcissus, and Oedipus, the point of departure for Gildenhard and Zissos.¹⁸
- 15 Lucretius' theory of perception provides a paradigm for this argument as well in its specification that sight and sound move at different rates. Visual *simulacra* travel so

swiftly that their perception appears simultaneous with their creation, as Lucretius demonstrates with the example of a reflecting basin where the stars appear at the same time as they do in the sky (*DRN* 4.211–13). The creation of sounds, by contrast, defines the ‘smallest perceptible moment of time’.¹⁹ It is the comparison between the two, the lag between hearing and sight, that reveals the temporal aspect of each sense, and this difference in turn further reveals the materiality (*res*) of their stimuli (*DRN* 6.165–6).²⁰ This is the same combination of visual and aural *imagines* that also create the perceptual conundrum of absent presences suggested by real bodies that are themselves unseen. These Lucretian properties of sight and sound, whose relation plays such an important part in the language and plot of the episode, also predict the twin phenomena that will be the focus of my analysis of how the visual and the verbal interact as media for the reception of Ovid’s narrative: the different ways they represent time and their capacity to contrast the reality of signs with the reality of what signs depict.²¹

- 16 Two formulations of Gildenhard and Zissos will help me illustrate how consciousness of time both results from and contributes to the process of recognition as it travels from Narcissus within the text to the audience. Their statement that Ovid has placed the Narcissus story ‘at the very juncture where the sequence of Theban legend calls for an Oedipal figure’ (2000, 130) makes clear how a comparison to the tragic repertoire emphasizes the absence of the Labdacids from Ovid’s Theban cycle. In strictly chronological terms, however, Narcissus would be a displaced Oedipus, whose reign comes three generations later. But this suggests by contrast the synchronism between Narcissus and Dionysus. Within Book 3, the twin stories of Tiresias and Narcissus form a kind of comic prelude to Ovid’s *Bacchae* (*ridet*, 3.514–*iocos*, 3.319), filling the space between Bacchus’ departure from Thebes as an infant (3.316–7) and his return as a youth (3.528), which also begins the action of Euripides’ play and links it to the succeeding story in Ovid’s poem. The synchronism between Dionysus and Narcissus also, as I shall discuss in different contexts throughout my argument, crucially emphasizes the peripeteia the youth experiences and gives it a particularly tragic dimension. Narcissus’ trajectory from infant to youth and his failure to mature beyond that point also make him rival Pentheus as Bacchus’ narrative double. Dionysus never ages because he is a god; Narcissus because he is not. Thus the moment of resemblance stands in contrast to the very different endings of their stories.
- 17 The synchronies that relate Dionysus and Narcissus in terms of absolute chronology and stage of life are also bound up with the medium through which they are expressed. Gildenhard and Zissos’ description of Narcissus as ‘the mirror image of Sophocles’ Oedipus’ again suggests an important distinction. The Dionysiac presence in the Narcissus episode, while it will be confirmed in hindsight by predicting a similar misprision on the part of Pentheus, is largely a visual one, indeed a mirror image: he appears in the ‘hair worthy of Bacchus or Apollo’ (3.421) Narcissus beholds in his reflection.²² Just before the description of that godlike hair, Narcissus’ eyes appear like a double star (*geminum, sua lumina, sidus*, 3.420). Hardie connects this with the double sun that appears to Pentheus under the spell of Bacchic delusion. It also interposes the youth’s reflection on the same image that Lucretius had used to convey the instantaneous appearance of visual *simulacra*, the reflection of the night sky on the watery surface of a mirror (*DRN* 4.212–13). These *lumina*, however, similarly make it clear that Narcissus does not look like Oedipus. That he resembles him in his metaphorical blindness only highlights the crucial and non-metaphorical role of vision

in the youth's story. Narcissus in the underworld still gazes at himself (3.504-5): the king's first justification for his self-blinding is that he does not know 'with what eyes' he would look on his father and mother in Hades (*OT* 1371-4). If eyes and sight as material phenomena differentiate Narcissus from Oedipus, the likeness between the two figures, as Gildenhard and Zissos describe it, is largely situational and is conveyed through language, both verbal echoes, above all the Tiresian prophecy that governs their stories, and tropes like paradox. Narcissus resembles Oedipus because he comes to 'know himself', a plot twist that is itself an intertextual echo.

- 18 Such differences between Oedipus and Narcissus themselves fit in with Gildenhard and Zissos' argument that the emphasis on reflection and echoing in the episode constitutes a metapoetic commentary on its intertextuality, which always reveals distance as well as similarity.²³ But where they subsume both sonic echoes and visual reflections to this effect, as Hardie draws together both as Lucretian sensory images, I will again stress the distinctions to be made between the media perceived by eye and ear.²⁴ Mirrors and echoes both propagate likeness, but differently and to different degrees, and contrasting as well as comparing these two forms of reflection heightens the tragic effect of recognition within the passage as a whole. Thus if the narrative echoes of Oedipus suggest Narcissus' mortality through likeness, the visual resemblance to Bacchus reveals the same thing negatively and simultaneously highlights the Dionysiac element of Oedipus' dilemma by introducing a visual *mise en abyme* that projects Oedipus' recognition towards the sensory experience of the poem's own audience. Sophocles tragedy, arguably, never places Oedipus in the role of spectator as explicitly as the *Bacchae* does Pentheus, and the refraction of his recognition through seeing as Narcissus helps close that gap.
- 19 Before showing how such complementarity also possesses a self-referential dimension, revealing how the different media Ovid evokes as analogues to his representation of Narcissus illuminate his experience by comparison and contrast, I want to suggest first how the same reciprocity also describes the relationship between allusion and sensory recognition themselves. The very flow of literary allusion from tragedy to Ovid, perhaps filtered through Aristotle's account of mimesis, resembles the passage of Lucretian images through space, with each pressing others before it to create the immanent and instantaneous presence of what they represent. But this likeness between Lucretian perception and Dionysiac transmission produces a similarly ambiguous effect. A Lucretian emphasis in reading the passage pulls it towards the realm of the physical and experiential, the here and now of the reader which is after all the basis for the Epicurean understanding of the universe.²⁵ By contrast an awareness of tragedy suggests a way of figuring the source of those images in poetic performances that convey the immanence of a divinity experienced through the representation of myth, while a denial of the direct intervention of the divinity and of the reality of myth is foundational for Lucretian ethics and poetics. Dionysus in tragedy both is and is not his representation as atoms are both invisible and everywhere immanent in sensory experience. The comparison of the two modes of transmission therefore makes it possible to recognize at once their complementarity and their fundamental incompatibility.
- 20 So too the textual model of reception makes clear that the extension of visual imagery from the text to the reader undergoes a similar physical and referential mediation that gives it both presence and absence. How familiar Ovid's audience would have been with

Narcissus as a visual subject has become a controversial question (see below n. 77). But beyond the possibility that painted representations of the youth and his reflection of the kind we see in Pompeian fourth-style decoration and which Philostratus and Callisthenes will use for their explorations of artistic naturalism were known to him,²⁶ Ovid's account of Narcissus' deceptive *imago* already suggests its equivalence to artistic representations. The first consequence of the glimpse he catches of his reflection is to turn the 'real' Narcissus into a sculpture through the literary reflection of simile: 'he stops motionless with the same expression, as if sculpted of Parian marble' (3.418–9).²⁷ And this sculpted Narcissus reappears in a context that heightens the image's incongruity when it seems to come to life, or rather do battle with its own lifelikeness, in 'striking his bare breast with marble hands' (3.481). Here too, the explicitness of Ovid's reference to the visual arts as a medium of representation may be enhanced by a glance at the critical tradition by which their naturalistic effects were described. The result of the shock of Narcissus' marble hands is to produce a range of colors likened to apples and ripening grapes (3.483–5), and the latter comparison may recall the famous anecdote in which Zeuxis proves his technical mastery by tricking birds into pecking his painted grapes.²⁸ Thus on the one hand the likening of Narcissus to a work of art both makes his physical appearance more apprehensible, and if we imagine a reading taking place in a room itself adorned with sculpture and painting, whether or not a 'Narcissus' figured among them, it gives the textual image a corollary in the direct visual experience of the reader. But on the other, that awareness is countered by a self-consciousness about viewing, thanks to the mediation of such images through both the obviously literary device of the simile, which itself conveys difference as well as likeness, and through the possible allusion to a critical description of artistic viewing itself.

- 21 Not only do references to the visual arts intensify an awareness of representation by paralleling the same 'reflection' of experience, first in the medium itself and then through commentary on that medium, that we encountered in Ovid's evocation of tragedy, but the competition between vision and text/sound to capture the real Narcissus complicates and redoubles the tension between distance and presence that each descriptive mode generates on its own. Drawing together tragic recognition with visual reception directs attention on the one hand to ways in which verbal art can approximate visual images, whether through constructing mental ones via techniques of visual representation, *enargeia*, or through its own iconic properties of verbal arrangement.²⁹ On the other hand, readers do not see even approximate likenesses to the beauty that leads to Narcissus' downfall, nor do they confront, as the viewers in so many Pompeian wall-paintings, Narcissus directly as though he were their reflection.³⁰ Yet the very consciousness of their distance from this experience recaptures all the more intensely one direction of Narcissus' discovery: that they are not him. This possibility that even the audience for a verbal narrative, in proportion to their greater self-consciousness about their difference from Narcissus, may be all the more susceptible to the longing such difference creates goes together with another means of identifying with the represented lover that words may make easier than images: if painting, for example, facilitates seeing Narcissus from the outside, words perhaps facilitate an understanding of his own experience of viewing. Even the viewer of a painting of Narcissus who conflates the surface of the image with a mirror, is still seeing double. Narcissus in the image, even when he returns the viewer's gaze, is accompanied by a reflection of himself that opens up space between the image and an

actual mirror. By contrast, Ovid's narrative modulates between the arch apostrophe of an omniscient narrator, chiding Narcissus for his foolishness (3.432–6), and passages of direct discourse, where the speaker/reader's own voice becomes that of the lover.³¹ Narcissus' dramatic presence as a speaker even overwrites the moment of recognition itself, which is never directly narrated. In this way, the challenge of the audience's disentangling themselves from Narcissus, at the very moment of recognition, becomes even greater than in the case of a visual image, which remains an object.

- 22 This telescoping distance between the reader and the internal viewer is complemented by another seemingly inevitable point of comparison between words and images, their evocation of time. Here is a recent scholarly ekphrasis of a Pompeian painted Narcissus: 'As in the *Metamorphoses*, Campanian representations of Narcissus depict a prolonged, almost indefinite moment of inaction, in which narrative is supplanted by a direct appeal to the senses and the emotions'.³² Although this is not her main point, the art historian's own language reveals how, within the painted scene, time seems to stop. Painting is timeless, but for that reason cannot easily represent the passage of time.³³ Indeed, while we commonly describe the paintings as showing the myth of Narcissus, strictly speaking they do nothing of the kind.³⁴ For in none of these scenes does Narcissus have a story. The crucial moment of recognition that leads to his death is never represented.³⁵ On a smaller level of signification too, to the extent that the words themselves become images, whether as Butler suggests by simulating the iconic surface of an image through their letters or through the more static verbal arrangements such as golden lines that give an immediately apprehensible form to units of the narrative, they hinder the capacity to form mental images, which require the letters to resolve into words, and the words into sentences, and the sentences into narrative.³⁶
- 23 The most obvious means by which Ovid signals the competition between the visual and verbal within his narrative results from his pairing Narcissus' sight of his reflection with the tale of the auditory Echo.³⁷ As will be discussed, Echo herself makes Narcissus' experience more immediate since she provides a desiring 'focalizer' for his sufferings, but at the same time her presence as a viewer within the text can contribute to the effect of distance that attends the realization that the audience is not seeing Narcissus. This furthering of the pull between absence and presence, which I have already claimed for the interaction between verbal and visual representation, also accentuates a difference in the awareness of time that results from each medium, one consonant with the Epicurean understanding of the different rates at which sound and visual images travel. As Narcissus perishes seen, as a viewer, his voice is taken up by Echo, who has become a purely sonic presence. She thus points towards the prolongation of Narcissus' story that allows it to be known by Ovid's audience, and herself subsists within the story. But while she never entirely perishes, she is at this moment unable to be seen, symbolizing at once the fullest separation from the visual and the concomitant invisibility of the text's audience, who can never see themselves in an image.
- 24 In this multi-form contrast between the purely verbal and the purely visual, the Ovidian text, it should be clear, cannot stand simply on one side or another. However, Echo's presence also reveals a contrast within the poem's own distinctively shifting subject, metamorphosis.³⁸ This contrast will at once highlight different temporal dimensions of the phenomenon and correspondingly make metamorphosis itself an index of different ways of perceiving time. Francoise Frontisi-Ducroux and Alessandro Barchiesi both identify the process' duration over time as a defining aspect of Ovidian

metamorphosis.³⁹ By contrast, Greek accounts of metamorphosis tend simply to juxtapose different forms via a verb like 'became'. This difference in how metamorphosis is perceived draws out the tensions between visual representations, which are there all at once, and diachronic narrative. Echo is the key to perceiving this contrast both as a metamorphic subject in her own right and thanks to the perspective she offers on Narcissus' change. Her own transformation from nymph to voice is one of the most gradual in the poem, spread throughout the episode in ways that make it unclear whether the process is complete. By contrast, as we have seen, the nymphs who prepare Narcissus' funeral are confronted by a substitution that has already taken place, a metamorphosis in the past tense that is equally absent from Ovid's own account: 'they find a yellow flower in place of a body' (*croceum pro corpore florem/ inveniunt*, 3.509–10).⁴⁰ What those who merely see Narcissus as a flower miss, therefore, is the opportunity to experience the temporal dimension of metamorphosis captured through narrative. Again, however, Echo has been able to perceive the entire story, and so for her his metamorphosis too seems as gradual as her own.

- 25 My aim in these two sections has been to highlight the significance of time in the episode as an element of human experience recognized through Narcissus' encounter with his reflection.⁴¹ Consciousness of time reveals how the real Narcissus is different from the way he appears, as, conversely, the immortal presences within the story can never be seen as themselves but only in disguise. Appropriately, time too is invisible. It is, as Tiresias will predict, precisely what Narcissus will not see if he sees himself (*visurus*, 3.347). But neither can the blind prophet himself literally see it. Again, as the reflection ultimately manifests Narcissus' presence only when its own lack of substance is perceived, Ovid's poem reveals time through a dialectic involving an awareness of its own mode of representation alongside the substance of that representation. More precisely, it is through the play between evanescent speech and enduring image that Ovid's poem becomes the mirror of Narcissus and of time as his invisible double. I understand Ovid's efforts to make time visible, therefore, as something more than a self-referential reflection on his own intermedial achievement of pitting word against image. In the remaining sections of this paper I hope to demonstrate above all how the pre-occupation with temporality makes the tension between the ways the reader apprehends the narrative itself an instrument for achieving a knowledge of mortality.

III. Tragedy, Desire, and Temporality

- 26 Tiresias' evocation of the old and all too familiar Delphic maxim also sounds against the emphasis on newness two lines later with the reference to the 'novelty of Narcissus madness', which is presented as an affirmation of his words, as though *noverit* could be recognized in *novitas* (3.350).⁴² This novel pathology points to Ovid's own seemingly incongruous repurposing of the phrase as an innovative element in a love story. As if to underline this generic distance, the prophet's words strive to isolate Narcissus from any such atavistic revelations: his existence depends on avoiding self-knowledge rather than obeying the Delphic injunction.⁴³ In their own demonstration of the intertextual importance of the tragic Oedipus to Ovid's placement and handling of the episode, Gildenhard and Zissos are equally aware of the alterity between this pastoral story, made unbelievable by its protagonist's obtuseness, and the quintessentially urban tragedy of Thebes' enlightened king.⁴⁴ Of course, such distance can itself be crucial to

the tragic effect: Oedipus recognizes his identity with the polluting presence he perceives as most unlike himself.⁴⁵ But it also sets the stage for a reading of the episode that emphasizes how far Ovid has moved from the stage in cleverly replacing Oedipus with such an incongruous double. Without losing sight of the essential uncanniness of finding tragedy even in Ovid's erotic 'Arcadia', this section aims to establish that Ovid's Narcissus' self-discovery does not just transplant a tragic plot to a fundamentally different generic environment. On the contrary I will be suggesting how its very erotic subject matter can bring Ovid's narrative closer to tragedy, highlighting an aspect of Narcissus' myth that is equally crucial to Sophocles' play and indeed to the larger tragic nexus that involve the house of Labdacus. The thematic pre-occupation that, I will suggest, makes Ovid's Narcissus Oedipal in a less obviously ironic way is temporality. Already in Sophocles' tragedy, the exposure of Oedipus' paradoxical doubleness, his marriage no-marriage and his status as at once begetter and begotten, requires the focalizing presence of 'all-seeing time' (OT 1213). It is this synchronizing lens on the diachronous plot that reveals the otherwise invisible identities,⁴⁶ and by which, simultaneously, antithetical linguistic signs come to mirror Oedipus' running together of roles, begetter and begotten, usually kept apart in the sequence of human life.

- 27 Classical lovers are notoriously dissatisfied with time, wanting either to hurry it up or slow it down to extend love's ecstasies; and I start this discussion by emphasizing the role played by such temporal distortions within Ovid's narrative. The ability afforded the reader of not only seeing time patterns thrown into confusion but focalizing the desires of characters combines a cognitive awareness of time with an experiential one. Desire deforms chronology from the moment of Narcissus birth, where he seems to have jumped ahead of infancy by being lovable before his time (*iam tum qui posset amari*, 3.345). Ovid seems at once to restore order and to obey the impulse to realize Narcissus' erotic potential when the narrative jumps immediately to his sixteenth year (3.351). But this lands him at another ambiguous moment, at the threshold between ages when he could seem a boy or a youth.⁴⁷ The significance of this shift is accentuated by the distinctively Ovidian contrast between his male and female lovers.⁴⁸ In conformity with Greek erotic protocols, the men love him first (*ante*, 3.403) when he is a boy, and the women when he is a man and capable of an active sexual role. Ovid however deforms this sequence in a number of ways, not least by drawing out the precise point of transition, when he is both lover and beloved, a state which structuralist divisions of erotic experience into active and passive roles make a conceptual conundrum.⁴⁹
- 28 The poet has also disordered the narrative by describing the female Echo ahead of the chronologically prior *viriles coetus*, and by linking this narrative priority to themes of haste and delay in a context that distinguishes mortals from immortals. Echo had delayed the goddess Juno, and as a result she is punished by being made to wait. Condemned to speak only at the end, her anticipatory place in the narrative mirrors her erotic impatience; yet Ovid has made Echo foreshadow events to come. This temporal displacement also has significance on the hermeneutic level: in Epicurean terms, someone seduced by vision loves an image that logically comes after reality even if the *simulacra* move so fast that their perception appears instantaneous; the *simulacra* are a product of matter and survive the dissolution of their source.⁵⁰ The belatedness imposed on Echo, which we experience in the phenomenal world as an echo, actually describes the way things are. But the sequence of causes in Ovid's poem, fantastical as it is, puts Echo first, and in this way channels the desire that images themselves generate

to be beginnings. A recognition of the real temporal order generated by an echo thus reinforces the potential for reading the episode as a didactic allegory about perception, and the challenges of relocating such an allegory in the context of a narrative where mythical continuities are what matters. The tension between what we know to be true and what perception makes us wish to be true as it recapitulates the Tiresian contrast between seeing and knowledge, turns the experience of the world to tragedy. Echo's desire, despite her finality, to become a beginning, need not only be read within the punitive world of linear time but according to an erotic clock where there is only delay. And yet as the appearance of Narcissus regarding his appearance turns out to be but the foreshadowing of his death, as an *umbra* becomes an *umbra*, that erotic timelessness becomes but the temporal anticipation of mortality.⁵¹ The very image that creates the desire to escape time precisely through its enduring sameness becomes a trace of its loss. The discursive tension between philosophy and myth shapes the readers' cognition of the poem by reminding them of the difference between the way things are and how Ovid shows them.⁵² However, it also makes this hermeneutic uncertainty not just a means of coming to know the world, of reflecting on the way things are, but a moment of self-knowledge that collapses the difference between the lessons of myth and science in the face of mortality. In this process time is both the phenomenon whose reality is discovered, and it is a dynamic component of the medium by which we come to know it. It is both immanent and concealed, and we are equally made aware of it when it escapes representation, as it does in an image and when, as in a narrative, its operation can be traced and felt in the anticipation and delay generated by the fears and desires of those who act within the story.

- 29 Echo's thwarted anticipation of Narcissus' mortality throws into relief the similarly tragic aspect of Narcissus' own temporal delusions. Where she hurries up, he stands still and commands his image to remain. If Echo shorts the circuit from love to death, Narcissus lingers in the familiar tracks of the ephebic hunter, like Hippolytus whose rejection of Aphrodite amounts to a denial of his existence in time, freezing him in a moment of likeness to his divine companion Artemis and pre-empting the reproduction necessitated by mortality.⁵³ Another tragic myth brings an analogous erotic violation closer to the intertextual orbit of Narcissus via Sophocles' *Oedipus*. Where Hippolytus rejects women and like Narcissus seeks isolation, Oedipus' father Laius, in a story Euripides presented as the *aition* of pederasty, abducts Chrysippus, the son of his host Pelops, who in turn curses him either with childlessness or death at the hands of his own child.⁵⁴ The curse itself sufficiently makes clear the reciprocal connection between pederasty and the rejection of reproduction. The inequality of the ages between Laius and the object of his desire may also in this context imply an attempt to disorder time that also has bearing on Narcissus' story. The narrator describes Narcissus as able to seem (*videri*, 3.352) either a *iuvēnis* or a *puer*. When Narcissus addresses his reflection as *unice puer* (3.454),⁵⁵ it both reproduces and challenges this assertion of his chronological doubleness. The rhetorical aim of the address is of course to seduce. As speaker, Narcissus has become an *erastes* addressing a beloved *pais*; the fiction of two Narcissuses therefore reproduces the split in erotic categories suggested by his maturation. However, this lover portrays the object of his desire as emphatically still a *puer*, 'uniquely' a boy as opposed to the narrator's assertion of the ambiguous appearance he projects. This peeling apart of what the narrator reveals and what Narcissus thinks he sees further relates his own misinterpretation of a visual image to a preference to look back to an earlier time of life.⁵⁶ Although Laius' rape of Chrysippus is never mentioned

in Sophocles' *Oedipus*, it was elsewhere presented as the ultimate cause of his own misfortunes, and Turner 1969 convincingly uses it to stress the centrality of time as a theme throughout the myth, especially in the hero's ability to solve the riddle of the Sphinx by ordering the ages of man. Given Gildenhard and Zissos' demonstration of the many allusions to Oedipus in this episode, a special kind of future reflexive temporal distortion comes into play when we link Narcissus to Laius. Narcissus may 'echo' the Oedipus, but the substance of his experience looks back to an event that was simultaneously starting point for the Theban king's own tragic sufferings, and by a comparable *hysteron proteron*, of the very passion that he feels. Narcissus' story represents the first appearance of same sex desire in the poem.⁵⁷

IV. Reflections of Gods and Mortals

- 30 The correction of Narcissus' mistaken perception of himself only as a boy when he is already a man involves not only turning the narrative of the tale towards his own death, making this lingering moment an event within a story, but constructing another visual juxtaposition, that of the beloved *umbra* with the *umbra* Narcissus will become after death. Where Narcissus' desires stop time by making him immortal, both he and his audience are allowed to see precisely his mortality. Having emphasized to this point the Tiresian medium of tragedy as the bridge between beginnings and ends, I want to pay some attention to the embedded perspective that acquires this knowledge through the synchronization of images. Vernant begins his famous essay 'In the Mirror of Medusa' by describing a mirror placed at the exit of the shrine of Despoina at Lykosoura in Arcadia: 'whoever looks into this mirror sees himself dimly or not at all, but the statues of the gods and the throne can be seen conspicuously' (Paus. 8.37.7). Vernant interprets this as follows: 'on the mirror of the temple, the face of the living is murky or effaced. The worshipper who looks at himself when he leaves sees himself not as he is, but as he will be when he has left the light of the sun to enter the land of the dead: a dim shadow, blurred, indistinct, a head shrouded in night, a specter henceforth without a face'.⁵⁸ It would be difficult to claim that Ovid refers specifically to the optical mysteries of Despoina's shrine.⁵⁹ However, the presence of such a mystical function of mirrors in the Greco-Roman imaginary does at least allow us to test its potential significance for a reading of the Narcissus story. And indeed the Arcadian mirror brings out certain patterns in Ovid's text that reveal a similar contrast between mortality and divinity. When Narcissus' tears disturb the surface of the pond, his image, previously described as an *umbra* (3.434), is said to become *obscura* and seems to depart (3.475).⁶⁰ The obscurity of the mirror image that comes after Narcissus recognizes himself contrasts with the brilliance and divinity that first confront him. His unshorn hair and still beardless cheeks—the features that identify him as a youth, and therefore desirable as a sexual object, suggest the quintessentially ephebic divinities, Apollo and Bacchus (3.421).⁶¹ And in contrast to becoming *obscura*, this first image in the mirror evokes Parian marble and ivory. Thus the diachronic story of the image moves from a verbal representation, grounded in the techniques of *enargeia*, of the gods, who, as Narcissus will realize, are not there, to the disappearance of the mortal viewer.⁶² And this contrast between images, which we might assimilate to Frontisi-Ducroux' account of Greek metamorphoses conveyed through juxtaposition, accomplishes a revelation of mortality through the intervention of the quintessentially dramatic peripeteia of anagnorisis.⁶³ This comparison, incidentally, also makes the reflection of Narcissus

appear less a forward looking aition for techniques of realism in the arts than a projection of the almost talismanic properties of the divine image.⁶⁴

- 31 This doubling of Narcissus' image, combining the illusion of the divine and the all too veristic glimpse of his final fate, is of course very at home in the Dionysiac poetics of book three, as explicated by Hardie and discussed above in section 2.⁶⁵ The doubleness of perspectives by which spectators find themselves within the story recalls the Euripidean use of the same character, Pentheus, as a bridge between the drama and its audience. But Ovid transfers the experience of recognizing this double divinity, who, as both god and mask, confounds distinctions between absence and presence, to a purely narrative plane. Dionysus, whose return to his native Boeotia is first intimated in Narcissus' reflection, is most himself when he is in disguise, whereas for Narcissus to recognize that he is an image signifies only disappearance and mortality. I hope to add to that approach in this section by emphasizing how the perception of temporality in and through narrative contributes to that complex apprehension. Indeed Dionysus may be but one face of the hidden presence of time itself: duration is after all also a fundamental distinction between the forms the divinities use to conceal their identities and the permanent metamorphoses of mortals.⁶⁶ The Bacchic epiphanies that follow in book three also balance a slow metamorphosis conveyed through the narrative of the sailors transformed to dolphins with the zero-grade metamorphosis of Pentheus, who does not actually turn into anything and whose transformation consists simply in the juxtaposition of the Bacchants' mental image of him as a boar and his real human countenance.⁶⁷
- 32 The sailors' prolonged metamorphosis is also a watery one, culminating in their seeming to absorb the very element that has received them.⁶⁸ Here again two opposed spectatorial roles within the story mobilize contrasting responses and doubly reveal the contrast between permanence and ephemerality. The sailors perceive their own transformation, and so form a bridge to the unchanged spectator who recounts their story. Narcissus, who looks directly at the image with no initial consciousness that it is an image, acquires this awareness over time as the darkening face of the disappearing mortal replaces the brilliance of divinity manifested only through a reflection of its image. Meanwhile Echo is also seeing Narcissus, not his image. And conceptually viewing the mirror from the side rather than looking directly at its mimetic surface gives it a new dimension of depth.⁶⁹ As Marie-Louise von Glinski points out, the reflection on water is also but a transient simulacrum for the marble statues or actual paintings to which it is compared.⁷⁰ For the real material of which the image is composed is not solid like marble or the surface of a painting but fluid. In addition to breaking the chain of similes by which its surface is like a painting which is like Narcissus who is like a god, this perspective imposes a metonymic identity between Narcissus and the matter, not the image.⁷¹ His mother calls him Narcissus, but in the narrative he is first named as Cephisius, after his father, the river.
- 33 While the fountain itself may seem an isolated tableau, remembering this early stage of the story gives it a narrative flow. Narcissus' origins as a river inevitably convert a *fons* into a spring, a starting point. Ovid describes the youth's conception when the river enwraps the nymph Liriope and violates her 'closed within his own waters' (*clausaeque suis Cephisos in undis/vim tulit*, 3.343–4). He was born from the union of an image (Liriope, 'lily-face') and a stream. Recalling this scene makes clear that Narcissus' desire for himself, is, in both the mythical and Freudian sense, an Oedipal one, a reversion to the

moment of his own conception: in longing for his image, Narcissus is at once isolating himself from the mortal processes of generation and pulled back to them. If there were only a reality to be trapped in the water, as opposed to a mere image. As Hardie points out, the materiality of water also stands at the origins of Narcissus' desire thanks to the metaphor of thirst that signals its inception (3.415).⁷² It may be too much to point out that the source of the Cephisos is Mt. Cithaeron, where Oedipus was exposed as a baby.

- 34 Conceptualizing the mutual enfolding of image and stream reveals the paradoxical course of Narcissus' story. It illustrates, on the one hand, the difference between simile and metaphor; the mere image draws Narcissus away from his aqueous nature towards what he merely resembles. Not only does Liriope's name highlight visuality, but her actual image in the poem is described as blue '*caerulea*'. She thus anticipates not only the final form that Narcissus will take, when he moves from his father's name to his own, which visually reflects hers, but also those celestial phenomena that her son sees in his image on the water's surface (3.420). But the contrast also hints at the complementarity of the linear narrative and the time-aligning images it contains. The mother's presence unites Narcissus' beginnings with his endings in the narrative, as Cephisos' flow becomes curved in embracing her (*flumine curvo*, 3.342). On the other hand, that generational sequence anticipates the watery nature of matter that make it narratable: as Pythagoras will say, everything flows (*cuncta fluunt*, 15.178), although he goes on immediately to present that flow as a succession of images (*omnisque vagans formatur imago*). So here 'these flowery waters and these watery flowers' emerge at his story's Aristotelian beginning, middle, and end. When death 'closes his eyes' (*lumina mors clausit*, 3.503) it shuts off both his perception of these images, and the images themselves (his eyes were *lumina* within the interlocking word order of 3.420, *geminum, sua lumina, sidus*), and returns him directly to the reality of his beginnings: Cephisos raped his mother 'closed' in his waves (*clausae*, 3.343). And his paradoxical double survival converts him to an earthly flower, the pure image of his mother in a real world where it will inevitably fade, and a pure image sitting beside, not in, the Stygian water of the underworld. Again, looking at him looking, as this tableau allows, makes his deception, and his mortality all the more apparent.⁷³
- 35 The conversion of the reflective spring to a narrative stream tightens the connections between Narcissus and Bacchus in other ways as well. While the image in the water links Narcissus to a series of mortal figures who will experience alienation as a result of seeing gods, like Actaeon and Pentheus, the watery associations also illuminate narrative connections with the god himself. Not only is Narcissus' belief in his beauty, both his arrogant disdain for others and later his conceptual trust in the reality of his image, a reflection of Semele's, in the divine sight of Juno (3.270), but the Stygian waters by whose constraint Jupiter comes to display his true image foreshadow the 'real' end of Narcissus, as a shade beside the same underworld river.⁷⁴ Juno had previously used the image to differentiate the mortal from the immortal: 'I am not Saturnia, if she will not go down sunk by her Jove in Stygian waters' (3.272). These waters too thus have both a reflective capacity, yielding images that show things as they really are in a way that mortals can never believe, and punctuate a narrative sequence in which mortals perish and gods survive. When Bacchus, presumably, for he is never specifically identified, appears to Pentheus in the guise of fisherman, one of the giveaways for Ovid's audience, though it is intended to deceive Pentheus, is his enigmatic claim that 'my father, dying, left me nothing except waters' (*morienisque mihi nihil ille reliquit praeter aquas*, 3.590–1). The name he assumes at that point too, Acoetes,

which is connected generally with the Greek for 'bedmate, husband',⁷⁵ makes him an inverse figure for Narcissus, especially if we hear a further, interlingual, resonance of Echo's plea for intercourse (*coeamus*, 3.387).⁷⁶ The images that liken gods and mortals occur within stories that inevitably combine death and disenchantment. Yet by virtue of being part of a continuous story, they suggest a promise of futurity, even if not for us. Dionysus is the god whose unique narrative of death and rebirth offered the possibility of some kind of immortal existence for those who accepted his difference, even as he denied it to those who saw him as just like themselves. Narcissus at the moment when he perceives his eyes as stars and his hair as worthy of Bacchus (3.420–1), is likened to a statue and therefore to Ariadne, who emerges from her statuesque paralysis at the coming of Dionysus, only to become fixed in brilliance as a constellation (8.177–82).

V. The Mask of Narcissus

- 36 Of the many potential realizations and challenges that flow from Narcissus' recognition of his image, my reading has concentrated on the temporal aspect of mortal existence, on reconciling the sight Narcissus sees, whose very reproducibility betokens its immortality, with a single moment in the unrepeatable and irreversible trajectory of a human lifetime. I would like to conclude now by considering a final aspect of how Ovid's text conveys this realization to its audience precisely in its combination of telling and showing. Section two analyzed in general terms the interpretative complexities set in motion by Ovid's self-conscious intermediality, his allusions to two modes of reception that can shape the audience's experience of his narrative: the visual arts, in particular painting, and tragedy. These forms of representation, I suggested, convey the temporal alternatives Narcissus encounters in their opposition of the synchronicity of painting with the linearity of narrative. They afford an additional and complementary contrast in their own levels of visibility: the text's relation to the visual arts is extravagantly 'figured' through simile. And this conspicuous surface itself likely reflects elements of the immediate visual environment of the work's consumption. And in this concluding section I would like to focus in again on the interaction between these media from an intertextual perspective. By showing how Ovid inserts his text into two systems of reference, the visual and the literary, that themselves respond to one another, I will offer a final demonstration of how the mimetic means Ovid uses to evoke Narcissus themselves give expression and meaning to the episode's preoccupation with temporality.
- 37 The mutual influence of mythological painting and Ovid's narrative can be difficult to trace.⁷⁷ But even if the immediate inspiration for some of these images, with all their variations, was textual, their very popularity reveals how at home Ovid's scene would be in the pastoral/erotic décor of contemporary luxury. On the other hand, while scholars like their literary allusions obscure to magnify their author's art and their own, even by today's hermetic standards, the references that make the reader aware of an Oedipal presence in the text seem deliberately concealed. As Gildenhard and Zissos point out (2000, 130), there is but one reference to Oedipus in the entire poem.⁷⁸ And yet once the connection is made, it appears inevitable and its significance inexhaustible. But these media offer more to a reading of Ovid's Narcissus than illuminating alternatives for understanding Ovid's strategies of representation, with

painting a visible and present image and tragedy an obscure source. Rather Ovid's triangulation points out how painting and tragedy also evoke one another, and so the poem enriches its own intermedial dialogue by revealing the tensions between word and image within the artistic languages it borrows and subsuming them to its own thematic revelations.

- 38 For all its potential foreshadowing through the presence of Tiresias, it is the moment of recognition itself that unlocks the tragic, and specifically Oedipal potential of Ovid's narrative. And, again, the physical dissimilarity of the two mythical figures intensifies Narcissus' revelation for the reader. Narcissus is a youth at the point of manhood completely isolated from sexuality and reproduction; Oedipus appears at an opposite turning point, having adult children now ready to succeed him, and his sexual and reproductive history has been, to say the least, complicated by the 'overlaying' of different roles. In terms of temporality, as Narcissus' inability to see the one image as two coincides with an unwillingness to imagine either that image or himself as subject to temporal change; Oedipus by contrast must realize that the person he is and the person he was are one, that the polluting murderer most unlike him is also, under the eyes of time, who he is now. These contrasting acknowledgments of diachronicity, for Narcissus, and synchronicity, for Oedipus, are accompanied in both Ovid's and Sophocles' texts by a self-referential gesture that makes an awareness of the medium itself enhance its message. In Ovid's case, as I have suggested, this is none other than the emergence of Oedipus as a comparand at the moment of recognition. In the case of Sophocles' tragedy, it involves the manipulation of its most emphatically visual element, the mask.⁷⁹ As Calame and others have noted, Oedipus' self-blinding paradoxically creates a visible manifestation of his inner blindness. At the same time, it converts the mask from a tool in the realization of the narrative, a means of representing the character Oedipus, to an expressive symbol in its own right.⁸⁰ Put another way, as the mask ceases to see, it becomes at once a better reflection of Oedipus, who was always 'blind', and something other than an image, a signification of the absence of an original for the representation that both delays and predicts the character's death. This suddenly visible mask of Oedipus can also be seen in Narcissus' recognition, in the conundrum of an image that is ineluctably himself and also completely different, that both kills him and defers his death.
- 39 The idea that Sophocles' means for visualizing the overwhelming synchronism that Oedipus discovers appears in Narcissus' reflection brings us to painting. In technical terms, Narcissus' very self-absorption inevitably creates several challenges for the artist. The first involves the representation of his story as a narrative. For while it is not at all difficult to identify Narcissus, whose fate implies its own unique iconography, for all Zanker's (1966) discrimination between the 'naïve' and 'self-aware' Narcissus, it is not always easy to know what version of the story is being told, and whether repulsion from Narcissus, as deservedly punished for his erotic transgressions, or attraction as both sympathetic and desirable should prevail.⁸¹ To present Eros within the painting as a gloss only complicates matters for such a figure at once has a place in the story of the youth's punishment and represents the desire that extends from painting to audience. The primping self-exposure that for Zanker distinguishes the Narcissus who has recognized the image as his reflection similarly makes his own beauty more available to the viewer and his own punishment more excruciating. These narrative problems complement a technical one: quite literally where does the audience fit into the painting? As I briefly mentioned, the viewer seeing Narcissus can

never quite see as Narcissus.⁸² To put it in Ovidian terms, the reflective roles of Echo and Narcissus can never quite come together. The problems of narrative within the representation thus impinge on the painting's own entrance into time as part of the narrative of its reception, the drama of its effect on its audience. The point in the painting that brings this realization to a head, and, as a result seems to me to break the illusionism of the image, involves the reflection itself. In the brilliant version from the house of M. Lucretius Fronto (fig. 1), the eyes of the image in the pool reverse the direction of Narcissus' own gaze.⁸³ This makes them at once a realistic representation of the optical effects of mirrors and turns the image's gaze towards the viewer, so that at the same instant we recognize that image as the reflection of Narcissus within the story, and experience it as our own reflection.⁸⁴ In the version from the house of D. Octavius Quartio (fig. 2),⁸⁵ by contrast, the original Narcissus becomes our image, staring directly at the viewer.⁸⁶ But as a result, his reflection exists in a completely different visual environment; the up and down axis that represents the distinction between image and reflection within the painting seems at odds with the perception of the painting's surface as an image.

40 The techniques chosen for representing the reflection itself also have the effect of reducing a body to a visage and, to the extent that that visage in turning towards the viewer moves out of the naturalistic space of the painting, of seeming to participate both in representational and actual space and so of at once signifying the distance of the image from reality and negotiating its place in the real world. Thus, especially when the frontality of the reflection is added in, the face in the mirror assumes both the form and the function of a theatrical mask. It at once makes clear the 'otherness' of the image, its technical materiality, and draws the reader into its illusions. But to see this formal device as a mask can channel the viewer's experience in a number of ways, by, perhaps, evoking tragic allusions lurking within the myth, especially if we imagine the images interpreted through Ovid's narrative, but also by connecting the story to other elements in its visual environment. As several recent art historians have observed, viewing Narcissus in a Pompeian house was never an entirely isolating experience.⁸⁷ The *biclinium* in the house of Octavius Quartio, balanced the painting of Narcissus against another on the opposite side of an alcove that showed Pyramus and Thisbe.⁸⁸ This comparison at once completes the story of Narcissus by revealing, in the rather gruesome corpse of Pyramus, the deadly consequences of desire, and juxtaposes the youth's recognition of himself (or its absence) against Thisbe's recognition of her lover's corpse.⁸⁹ Such adumbration of mortality casts its reflection on the image of Narcissus as well by revealing the deadly suggestivity of the decapitated head floating in the water, which has been aptly called 'Gorgon-like'.⁹⁰

41 But another set of available visual comparisons allow Narcissus' visage to be seen as literally as well as figuratively tragic. In the case of the House of Quartio, a Dionysiac presence also appeared in the pairs of herms, portraying together a young and old Dionysus that lined the water-channel in the adjoining garden.⁹¹ And the mask itself was a ubiquitous decorative element that, existing as a motif in its own right, itself bridges the distance between representation and reality. Elsner describes how the Narcissus painting from the House of the Ara Massima, is not only visually surrounded by such masks but 'seems staged within a theater'.⁹² Although it is rash to speculate before its full publication, based on the photographs distributed through news media, the newly discovered Narcissus fresco in the House of Leda and the Swan, adds several of these narrative elements to the image of Narcissus. Within the entire decorative

scheme of the room, Narcissus is described as appearing 'as though part of a Dionysian retinue',⁹³ and there is, at least superficially, a striking contrast between the pallid coloration of Narcissus reflection and the much brighter pigments of his body, again turning the reflected image into an anticipatory *umbra*. Just beneath that reflection, outside the frame of the painting and appearing as an ornamental motif on the wall, is a frontally depicted older bearded figure akin to a theatrical mask and positioned beneath a representation of a stage set. This visage, upside down in relation to the reflection, as the reflection itself is to Narcissus' face, creates a series of inverted images proceeding from the painting's fictions toward the viewer.

42 This discussion has zeroed in on the mask as the point of contact between tragedy and visual representations of Narcissus. Through the mask, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos* highlights its use of visual signs to show what narrative cannot quite, the identity of blindness and vision, and through the mask, painters allow the self-contained image of Narcissus to look out at nearby images that suggest the completion of his own story and the visual context in which it is interpreted. It is also the device that through the attention it draws to the representative medium itself makes the moment of recognition within the narrative transferable to the viewers and spectators, who can thus see their own immediate experience reflected in the story at the same instant the protagonist recognizes himself in the figured image of a supposed 'other'.

43 Ovid similarly gestures towards the boundaries of the verbal and the visual at the moment of Narcissus' recognition. First of all, as I have noted, this recognition takes place within the monologue of a youth gazing at himself. In relying on such direct representation of the speech, rather than narrative, Ovid moves the mixed mimesis of epic closest to tragedy, and farthest from painting, which notoriously cannot speak. Yet Narcissus has himself been presenting a kind of ekphrasis of himself, describing the image from the perspective of the viewer. At the same time, Ovid highlights the self-referential aspect of this technique by presenting this distinctive combination of words and images as the clue that triggers Narcissus' self-recognition:

et, quantum motu formosi suspicor oris,
verba refers aures non pervenientia nostras!
iste ego sum! (3.461-3)

And, as I suspect from the movement of your beautiful mouth, you return words
that do not reach our ears. I am that one!

44 The act of looking (ironically present also in root of the verb *suspikor*, 'suspect') triggers the recognition of absent words. Or rather the insufficiency of the mere image is completed by Ovid's allowing us to hear, in Narcissus' voice, the very words that he can only see.

45 The os, as the visual representation of the organ of speech, might be recognized as a mask, especially to a reader familiar with images like those described. And similarly the end of the speech seems to present Narcissus as a disembodied 'face' that also blurs the line between reception and reality: *dixit et ad faciem rediit male sanus eandem* (3.474). He comes back to the 'same face' in the sense that he continues to gaze at the reflected face, that is his own. Or, perhaps, he returns to the same expression with which he had begun his speech, which again, comes to the 'same' in that the image to which he turns is also a return to himself. In the latter case, the description of Narcissus as '*male sanus*' recalls (*rediit*) not only his 'strange madness' (3.351) but the distorted rictus of the mask of tragedy, which reflects the *furor* of the character.⁹⁴

- 46 However, the combination of the visual and the verbal intimated in Narcissus' recognition can point not to their synthesis in Ovidian illusionism, but to the real absence of both. The reader cannot of course see Narcissus, and, if we imagine the text read silently rather than through the agency of a *lector*, neither can his voice be heard. Ovid accompanies this silent mask with another self-referential marker that would be inevitably present even to those who neither heard nor saw Narcissus: the mouth that Narcissus sees was described as *formosum*, and two lines after he 'comes back to the same face' that face is both mirrored and echoed as *forma* (*obscuraque moto/reddita forma lacu est*, 3.475–6).⁹⁵
- 47 In one sense, form transcends any particular visual or verbal representation. '*Forma*' is the last word in the narrative of the mortal Narcissus: 'death closes his eyes wondering at his form' (3.503). And as Plato would have it, it seems here to transcend manifestation in any particular part of the body. But it is also emphatically a word, which we can see imperfectly reflected in the word that describes the next manifestation of his beauty: the *florem* that the nymphs see in place of his body (3.509). To be more precise, it is not only a word whose appearance in Ovid's text this visual pun perhaps marks,⁹⁶ it is also the noun that designates the subject of Ovid's poem, and gives it its title.⁹⁷ Butler draws attention to the visual presence of the surface of Ovid's page and highlights its actual irregularity and fluidity.⁹⁸ This glimpse at the material reality of the page complements von Glinski's looking through the surface image of Narcissus' beauty to the fluid substance beneath to reveal the Dionysiac duality of *formae* when it is taken both as a word and as an index of the immortal reality beyond words. The letters themselves are neither quite matter, nor are they quite images. To emphasize their substantial presence evokes the Lucretian materiality of elements, whose recombination on the page provides a didactic gloss for the nature of the universe that page describes. *Forma* also defines the visual images these letters evoke. And the perpetual recombination of those images, flowers, youths, streams, fountains—the archetypal visual features of the poem which the Narcissus episode seems to concentrate to an unusual degree—forms a differently visualizable analogue to those Lucretian *elementa* as a way of representing the illusionistic world of the poem in microcosm. Thus the materialization of Ovid's page becomes simultaneously a Lucretian gesture and an anti-Lucretian one in its reliance on myth and *simulacra* to act as matter, or to become the substitute for matter. And as I have already suggested, it points to the Platonic transcendence of both words and things. The letters move with the flow of the text, as *formam* becomes *florem*, but they signify the form of beauty that defies time. Therefore, the play between words and images ultimately becomes a means of representing what cannot be perceived through either, time itself, and to attend to only one of its possible resolutions would be to miss the true force of the recognition achieved by Narcissus.

Epilogue

- 48 My aim in this paper has ultimately been to suggest how the challenges of recognizing Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, as myth or philosophy, as story or image, structure contrasting awarenesses of time. As a narrative, the poem shows time only through the dialectic between the perspectives of Tiresias who sees beginnings and endings simultaneously and the internal spectators who see the actual appearances to which he is blind. Time

not only flows like water but is itself invisible and is only glimpsed through the shifting images on its surface (*cuncta fluunt, omnisque vagans formatur imago*, 15.178). Yet each of these perspective moves in different directions towards a conception of time itself in static visual terms, a surface that shows its viewer time by juxtaposing the eternal and the transient, while making it unclear whether it is the image or the reality that lasts forever.

- 49 But it is equally the awareness of time that drives our perception of the poem's fundamental nature as mimesis through a kaleidoscope of shifting literary and artistic models. *Ad mea tempora*, I suggest, defines not only the linear trajectory of Ovid's subjects, from the beginnings of time towards the present, but also its *telos* as representation. In this respect, *mea* hints at *tempora*'s ability to zoom in on an aspect of individual appearance, the temples, a word play whose significance is well chronicled by Ahl (1985, 290–1). Rosati (1983, 42–51) has memorably described Narcissus as a figure for the poet, which of course complements his ability to reflect the reader as well. But we may super-impose on this young poet the image of another *vates* similarly at a temporal turning point between being a *praeceptor amoris* and his emergence as a voice within higher genres, Tiresias himself. When the prophet Tiresias returns to warn Pentheus of the dangers of seeing, he is described as moving *tempora albertia canis* (3.516). Having spoken of 'tempora' in revealing Narcissus' future, he here shows them in his countenance, and the contrast between the signs of age visible on his temples and the young protagonist's beauty forms its own mirror of Despoina. This visual echo is re-inforced by the word *albertia*, which recalls the white petals framing the golden center of the flower that signifies Narcissus. We simultaneously see time through the text in the sequence of visual images it evokes and in the text as pattern of juxtaposed signs, images, and stories. It is something that, like Tiresias, Ovid the *vates* tells us of and something his shows us, inseparable from our experience of the work's own changing form.

Figure 1. Fresco of Narcissus from the House of Lucretius Fronto (Pompeii V.4.a)

Figure 2. Fresco of Narcissus from the House of Octavius Quartio (Pompeii II.2.2)

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NOTES

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1. Konon, *BNJ* 26 F 1.24. For a full comparison, see Manuwald 1975. Papyrus evidence has revealed another treatment of the myth available to Ovid that likely derives from of Parthenius' *Metamorphoses*; see Hutchinson 2006.

2. Manuwald 1975, 353.

3. The terms of this distinction come from Zanker 1966. On the structure of the episode, see Vinge 1967, 17: 'Owing to the recognition, the reflection episode divides up into two parts or stages, and the reflection motif here proves to contain two motifs—the error and the recognition motifs'.

4. Bömer 1969, 538. Manuwald 1975, 363, recognizes that a 'knowing' Narcissus is compatible with the version in Konon.

5. Ovid's coalescence of desire with knowledge of the self through the Tiresian premonition is also particularly emphasized in Bartsch 2006 (esp. p. 85).

6. Gildenhard and Zissos 2000, 134, also note this as an ideal Aristotelian recognition. For a discussion of Aristotle's influence on Augustan poets' appropriation of tragedy, see Curley 2013, 52–3. Jolivet 2009 offers a precise and compelling demonstration of the importance of Aristotelian categories in Ovid's construction of recognition scenes although he does not go so far as to suggest that Aristotle's influence is meant to be recognized by the reader.

7. 'Narcissus' situation now exactly mirrors that of the engaged reader: he knows with his rational mind that the reflection has no reality, but cannot stop himself from continuing to address it if it had', Hardie 2002, 148.

8. For a more comprehensive theoretical account of how narratological notions of the representation of time can be applied to Ovidian narrative, see Nikolopoulos 2004, 41–68.

9. For such irony as a fundamental connection between Ovid's Narcissus and the tragic Oedipus, see the discussion of Gildenhard and Zissos, 2000, 136–7.

10. *OLD* s.v. *video* § 11. *Tempus*, it should be noted, rarely appears in this idiom.

11. Calame 2005, 105–7.

12. See especially Rosati 1983, 23–42.

13. Cf. the perceptive comments of Anderson 1997, 374.

14. See above all Hardie 1988 (=2002, 150–165) and Bartsch 2006, 84–103. The former offers a powerful demonstration of the narrative as a response to a Lucretian epistemology based on sight, which it re-mythologizes by moving to an earlier, mythical context; the latter sees the Lucretian allusions as also implying a rejection of Socratic models of instruction through erotic knowledge, which she anchors in Roman sexual attitudes. Narcissus emerges as a negative example within the Platonic tradition already in late antiquity at Plot. 1.6.8.8, as one who devotes himself to visible, corporeal images as if they were true (further 5.8.2.34); see Hadot 1976. However, following from Hadot's demonstration (pp. 100–101) that for Plotinus, in contrast to the Gnostics, the fault lies not in the images themselves but in their misinterpretation, my own reading, below in section 4, will stress the availability of Platonic forms within Ovid's Narcissus narrative alongside their Lucretian debunking.

15. This would be a contemporary as well as an archaizing interpretation: Wilkins 1917, in the course of a comprehensive discussion of the meaning of the Delphic inscription in antiquity, includes evidence for its use as a *memento mori* in Hellenistic and later epitaphs and poems (pp. 52–9). Other interpretations that have applied the Delphic intimations of Tiresias' words to Narcissus' story include Zanker 1966, 153, for whom reference to the saying points to a transition in the myth by which Narcissus' misapprehension of his image becomes 'a sort of transgression' (as opposed to his offense against Eros). He connects this transgression with the Neo-Platonic use of Narcissus, discussed in the previous note (p. 154). See also Cancik 1967, 45–6, who views Ovid as transforming and deflecting the full import of the phrase as a reminder of mortality: 'Der Delphische Spruch hat also bei Ovid nicht mehr eine theologische und moralische, sondern vor allem eine psychologische und, wenn man will, existentielle Bedeutung'. Gildenhard and Zissos 2000, 132, note that line 3.348 also virtually translates Tiresias' later warning to Oedipus' mother at Soph. OT 1068.

16. Hardie (2002, 165–72). The phrase of course alludes to Segal 1997; see especially pp. 215–71, on the theatrical illusion as a manifestation of Dionysus. Ovid's profound engagement with tragedy throughout the *Metamorphoses* has been comprehensively demonstrated by Curley 2013.

17. Gildenhard and Zissos 2000, 144, who in turn refer to an earlier formulation of Hardie (1989, 4) based solely on Lucretian echoes.

18. The connection had earlier been observed and discussed by Loewenstein 1984, 41–5.

19. Zinn 2019, 135.

20. Ibid., 134. On time perception in Lucretius generally, see Zinn 2016.

21. Note Hardie 2002, 161: 'Narcissus eventually wakes up from his delusion, at the point when he realizes that his reflection is soundless'.

22. Hardie 2002, 170. Note also the 'Dionysiac' effect of the uncertain focalization in this description that allows this likeness to be recognized at once by the reader and the internal viewer. This could be a comment the narrator adds to facilitate our ability to see Narcissus or it could describe the language he might use of his beloved.

23. Gildenhard and Zissos 2000, 142–4.

24. To be clear, the progression from sound to sight does feature in Hardie's description of a hierarchization of mirrors over echoes as marks of presence in pastoral (2002, 164).

25. This phenomenological point is meant as a complement to Hardie's account of the tension between mythical and Lucretian perspectives that results from making Echo the *aition* for the generation of sonic images. Again, note that this involves making a distinction in times. 'The nymph Echo belongs to a time before the truths of the Epicurean world are established' (1988, 77=2002, 154). Thus where Pausanias (9.31.7, see below n. 56) will doubt the Narcissus myth on the grounds that someone old enough to fall in love with his image could not be ignorant of how mirrors work, Narcissus' failure to consider the possibility that the words he hears repeated to him might simply be an echo, so obvious in hindsight, is exempted from such skepticism when we take it as a reminder that echoes did not yet exist in his world.

26. On Narcissus in the ekphrastic tradition, see above all Elsner 1996 (=2007, 132–76) and Bann 1989, esp. 105–26.
27. On the ‘pictorialism’ of Ovid’s narrative, see esp. Vinge 1967, 13–14.
28. Plin. *HN* 35.65; cf. also Sen. *Controv.* 10.5.27 for a variant version. The connection between Zeuxis’ deceptive grapes and the simile at 3.484 is suggested by Hardie 2002, 176, via the description of Liber’s deception of Erigone as ‘a false grape’ on Arachne’s tapestry (6.125). On evocations of this paradigmatic anecdote of visual realism in later ekphrases of Narcissus, see Elsner 2007, 144 (discussing Philost. *Imag.* 1.23.2), and on the anecdote itself Bann 1989, esp. 32–40.
29. Butler 2011, 77 uses the designation of the reflected objects as *signa* (‘statue’, 3.419; ‘meaningful gesture’, 3.360) to link them to the signs present to Ovid’s readers on the page (discussed below, n. 98). Rosati 1983, 36–8, also offers an important discussion of how Ovid’s echoing patterns within the text convert his work into a mimesis of the experiences described. See also von Glinski 2012, 118, on the effect of this verbal figuration within a simile that compares Narcissus himself to a statue. For Narcissus as the prompt for competition between verbal and visual representation in later Greek ekphrastic writing, see Elsner 2007, 140–3.
30. See esp. the discussion of von Glinski 2012, 120–2.
31. As Rosati 1983, 42–4, demonstrates, even that apostrophe which can, on the one hand, seem to distance Narcissus from both the audience and the author, by the nature of the gesture itself, also puts the audience in the place of Narcissus. And, indeed, in imagining that there is a ‘credulous’ subject there to be corrected, the audience themselves have fallen for an illusion and so become Narcissuses. See also Hardie 2002, 147.
32. Valladares 2012, 391.
33. If Ovid does evoke the foundational story of realistic painting in comparing, via simile, Narcissus’ appearance/reflection to a bunch of grapes, it is perhaps notable that he introduces the notion of temporal change. Both the grapes and the apples that accompany them in the simile are presented at a moment of transition to maturity that makes them even closer images of Narcissus (*ut variis solet uva racemis/ducere purpureum nondum matura colorem*, 3.484–5).
34. I am not of course claiming that static images cannot represent narratives. Indeed, one of my referees observes some of the technical devices Roman painters used to overcome this challenge, such as the representation of successive scenes within the same spatial continuum, as in the painting of Dirce in the House of Polybius (Croisille 2005, 181). My point is that the challenge the medium presents to depicting the temporal unfolding of events stands out by contrast to verbal narrative. So, conversely, the challenge that verbal narratives face in conveying visual images stands out by the comparison to painting and sculpture.
35. So Zanker’s 1966 treatment of Narcissus iconography also divides representations of Narcissus before the moment of self-recognition from those that show its result. The latter are indicated by the motif of Narcissus baring his own body to better enjoy the sight of his reflection. Strikingly, therefore, in these images the moment of recognition has none of the pathos of the Ovidian ‘*anagnorisis*’ either for the figure or the viewer, both of whom are allowed more fully to enjoy the erotic potential of the image.
- Of course, viewers may bring their knowledge of the entire story to the image and even prize representations that seem to have this narrative dimension. Cf. the comment of Callistratus (*Descr.* 5.1) that ‘the image represents together with Narcissus also his fortune (*tuchê*)’, (Elsner 2007, 139) and Philostratus’ enigmatic claim that ‘the spring paints Narcissus, and the painting paints the spring and the whole of Narcissus’ (*toû Narkissou panta*, 1.23.1).
36. As Elsner 2007, 147, notes in the context of a different argument, a turning point of the myth is precisely the stilling of the previously mobile hunter Narcissus when he catches sight of his reflection. Ovid’s narrative however mutes this effect since, as though it were indeed one of the

rhetorical *ekphrases* Elsner describes, he focuses not on the chase but on the remarkably still grove itself. When Narcissus enters the picture, so to speak, he is already tired (3.413).

37. See the persuasive suggestion of Vinge 1967, 12 that Latin's use of the same word, *imago*, for echoes and reflections facilitates the pairing. Hardie 1988, 74 (=2002, 152) adds a new element by suggesting how this combination of the visual and the verbal sharpens the evocation of Lucretius.

38. Metamorphosis too is at once Ovid's subject and a figure for his medium, which, as the poem's first sentence shows, both changes its signification as it is unpacked in time and in doing so changes words back and forth into bodies (*in nova fert...corpora*, 1.1–2).

39. Frontisi-Ducroux 2003, 91–2 and Barchiesi 2020, 19–20.

40. See also Manuwald 1975, 368–9, on Ovid's omission of Narcissus' metamorphosis, which he accounts for as incompatible with Ovid's description of his death.

41. The contrast between the permanent and the ephemeral has been celebrated as a central theme of Ovid's work in the 2019 collection by Casanova-Robin and Sauron, although the analyses included there center on its political significance.

42. This echo returns at the moment of *anagnorisis* itself, when it leads Narcissus to make a new prayer for a lover (*votum in amante novum*, 3.468).

43. Rosati 1983, 30.

44. Gildenhard and Zissos 2000, 140–1.

45. Gildenhard and Zissos, 2000, 136.

46. Gildenhard and Zissos 2000, 135, quote the lines as the point where 'the chorus articulates the paradoxical disaster of Oedipus' life through poignant polyptotic wordplay'.

47. So also Elsner 2007, 148, whose emphasis, however, is on the relationship between ambiguous sexual roles and ambiguous visual roles, not on temporality per se. Narcissus' confusing sexual identity as at once desirer and desired also plays an important part in Bartsch's analysis (2006, 84–103) in relation to both Ovid's double portrayal of vision as an active and passive process and the larger Roman rejection of the erotic model of education so important to Platonism.

48. Both Konon and Pausanias refer only to male lovers. As a referee well observes, 'this issue of priority of male/female lovers does not arise in the Catullan model (62.39 ff.), where it is a flower that is the object of (only figuratively erotic) desire'.

49. Elsner 2007, 147, relates the impossibility of Narcissus' desiring an image of himself to the erotic transgressions involved, citing Dover 1978, 16, on the incomprehensibility of lovers of the same age desiring one another.

50. The hysteron proteron effect of the narrative by which representation seems to come before reality is also the theme of Hamilton 2009, who uses a quite different set of arguments. See too Berger and Gabara 1996.

51. On *umbra* as a connection between the image and the shadows of the dead, see Vinge 1967, 12–13. For a fuller account of the underworld aspects of the pool where Narcissus sees his image, and its broader engagement with a Lucretian elision between images of the beloved and images of the dead, see Hardie 2002, 156–8, with further bibliography.

52. See Hardie's discussion (2002, 154–5) of the mythical Echo as an 'aition' for the Lucretian phenomenon, also p. 160.

53. See Zeitlin 1996, 231: 'Hippolytos had refused to cross the boundary between child and adult, thereby transgressing the line of temporality that divides human and divine'. In Konon's version of the story, Narcissus' rejection of all lovers is explicitly connected to his being a despiser of the god Eros. Manuwald 1975, 357–8, suggests that Ovid downplays this theme, but both the alternative version of the story and the larger mythic pattern make it readily available. For the comparison of Narcissus to Hippolytus, see, e.g. Hadot 1976, 108; Rudd 1986, 45; Elsner 2007, 153, and on the theme of failed transition to adolescence more broadly, Barchiesi and Rosati 2007, 182–3.

54. On the evidence for Euripides' *Chrysippus*, see, conveniently, Collard and Cropp 2008, 459–63.
55. For the Dionysiac significance of this moment, as an antiphrastic indicator of the god's ability to make his victim's see double, see Hardie 2002, 170. The interpretation that follows owes a great deal to the suggestions of an anonymous referee.
56. The impossible running together of two different stages of life also features in the story's reception history. Pausanias rejects the whole idea of Narcissus' falling in love with his reflection on the grounds that, 'it is utter stupidity to imagine that *a man old enough to fall in love* was incapable of distinguishing a man from a man's reflection' (Paus. 9.31.7, trans. W. H. S. Jones; emphasis mine). Again, there is an Oedipal connection: the mythical king who was so adept at recognizing that the old man and the infant are one, cannot conceive of his own identity with his earlier self until the climax of the drama. So Pausanias refuses to see as Narcissus because he cannot reconcile precisely the coexistence of child and lover that Ovid's narrative accentuates.
57. Indeed, as Barchiesi and Rosati 2007, 179, point out, Narcissus is the first human (male) lover in the poem. On the phenomenon of the 'future reflexive' allusion, see Barchiesi 1993.
58. Trans. Zeitlin, p. 142. On the programmatic impact of this description for Pausanias' text, see Platt 2011, 218–24 (esp. p. 222); see also her account of the images within the reflection, a Hellenistic group sculpted by Damophon in the 180's BCE (pp. 124–34).
59. Platt 2011, 222, alludes to Narcissus in the discussion of this mirror, but only as an example of the deceptiveness of reflection.
- Hadot 1976, 97, discusses another mystical mirror as a parallel for Narcissus' deceptive vision, the mirror which, in Orphic myth, Hera gives the infant Dionysus to distract him and so prepare for his murder by the Titans (Apollocl. *Bibl.* 1.9.19).
- There is also a significant Lucretian parallel for such use of a mirror to reveal mortality. At *DRN* 3.972–5, Lucretius invites his addressee to 'look back' at the time before his birth. That period, like death itself '*nil ad nos*', is described as a mirror nature holds up to show what our experience will be of the time after our death. This too would be a mirror in which the viewer's reflection would not appear.
60. So later 'Acoetes' first perception of his comrades' metamorphosis results from one's darkening (3.671).
61. Frontisi-Ducroux and Vernant, 1997, 214–15.
62. Compare von Glinski's observation (2012, 126–8) of the effect of the transition between images that suggest a material presence within the image (apples and grapes, 3.483–4, which themselves seem ambiguously to describe what Ovid's audience sees and what the internal spectator sees) and those that describe the actual fading of Narcissus as seen by the narrator (wax and dew, 3.487–90). Since the latter do not describe so much what Narcissus' looks like as what he was, they remain fixed in the audience's more 'real' perception of the youth himself. She also notes (p. 128) that '*matutinae* is the first temporal marker since the beginning of the story' (3.413).
63. Narcissus' own recognition at 3.463 also involves a recognition of narrative. The present tenses used before describe a perpetual reciprocity: I do something; you do something. The perfect *sensi* recasts the present as separated from the past through a decisive action. He can tell his story now.
64. Cf. Alberti's famous description of Narcissus as the inventor of painting, (*Pict.* 2.7), discussed by Bann 1989, 105–6 and 127–8, and Elsner 2000, 89.
65. Hardie 2002, 165–72. The Dionysiac associations of Narcissus also receive particular emphasis in Hadot 1976.
66. For more on the theological significance of metamorphosis as a point of contact between the human and divine, see Barchiesi 2020, 14–15. This is not an absolute distinction, of course, since Tiresias, on his way to vatic status, has learned how to transform himself, or more specifically to

travel back to an original form—as a result he can compare the experiences of both his original gender and of women. For more on such ‘self-transformers’, see Fantham 1993.

67. On the connection between Narcissus and Bacchus, especially the link with the deceptive appearance of the god in the encounter with the sailors, see Rosati 1983, 17.

68. *undique dant saltus multaque aspergine rorant
emerguntque iterum redeuntque sub aequora rursus
inque chori ludunt speciem lascivaque iactant
corpora et acceptum patulis mare naribus efflant.* (3.683–6)

69. For an equivalent effect of Echo as a viewing presence in painted representations of Narcissus, see Elsner 2007, 170–2.

70. von Glinski 2012, 122.

71. For the effect of this contrast between image and substance on the portrayal of Narcissus’ desire, see Hardie 2002, 145–6.

72. Hardie 2002, 159: ‘Narcissus’ erotic thirst is aroused by *simulacra* that come from a literal body of water’.

73. The course of a wandering stream may not only figure his prone form ‘poured’ into his image (*fusus*, 3.438) but also reveal specifically the ‘error’ (3.431) that deceives his own eyes as it incites him.

74. Even Jove’s promise to Semele that, whatever she asks, she will suffer no ‘repulsam’ (3.289) anticipates the stories of both Echo and Narcissus.

See also the discussion of the thematic importance of water in the myth by Hadot 1976, 96–8, who concludes that water ‘symbolizes the Dionysiac element’ in the story.

75. See Bömer 1969, 588, for references.

76. If Acoetes is Bacchus, then, again like Narcissus, the figure of the young man whom he recognizes as divine within the story he tells would be himself. But the god’s self-recognition here would be in every respect self-conscious (the narrative is constructed as a warning for Pentheus; thus Acoetes, if Bacchus, could not be ignorant of his identity, as Narcissus was), and the identity of the god and ‘Acoetes’ becomes an expression of his divine nature and leads to the mutual salvation of Bacchus within Acoetes’ story, and of Acoetes in the frame narrative. By contrast, his audience, Pentheus, another foil to Narcissus both in his unwillingness to be captured by images and his inability to recognize the truth that lies within them, fails both to recognize his interlocutor as a god (and in Euripides’ version of the encounter, the god is also his double) and to credit the story he tells.

77. It is important to be clear from the start that all of the surviving paintings of Narcissus (of which Hodske 2007, 166–71, lists 52) are Fourth Style; therefore, every example discussed below post-dates Ovid’s poem, likely by some fifty years. According to Knox, the question of whether Ovid is to be regarded as the source of such images ‘must be assessed on a case to case basis’ (2014, 36), and Narcissus is one of his strongest cases because of what seems its sudden popularity—there are no earlier attested examples of the subject—and because many (but not all) bear witness to what may be an Ovidian innovation in the story, the presence of Echo (pp. 40–41). Moreover, Knox’ clinching argument for Ovidian influence on Pompeian painting programs is the creation of assemblages that combine demonstrably literary, indeed Ovidian, allusions (pp. 47–51), and both of the Narcissus paintings discussed below appear in such contexts. Colpo 2007, 77–9, makes an even stronger claim than Knox, arguing also that Narcissus’s pose in the paintings precisely corresponds to Ovid’s description, but without taking account of the reverse possibility that Ovid is describing a painting. The debate about the direction of influence between Ovid and visual representations of his subjects, however, is a very old one, and Laslo’s 1935, 375–78, summary of earlier positions is still useful. His assumption that both Ovid and the painters whose works survive drew on Alexandrian sources, verbal and visual, that were themselves in dialogue, encourages him to posit visual influences for Ovid’s poetry even where earlier artistic depictions

do not survive or are not attested. Laslo also stresses the documented references to paintings and sculpture within Ovid's poetry as evidence of his engagement with these media. And especially in the Narcissus episode, Ovid makes explicit comparisons to works of art (3.419) and, perhaps, embeds allusions to art theory (3.484). Also, although some of the latter paintings contain Echo, not all of them do, and others show figures like Eros, who was present in Konon's narrative but is never mentioned in Ovid's. And Wallace-Hadrill (2018) has recently challenged Knox' argument that the *Metamorphoses* provides a source for these proliferating paintings of shared subjects on the grounds that they differ too much from Ovid's descriptions. He proposes instead that while the owners' choice of subjects may well have been influenced by their reading of Ovid, the painters would likely have based their work on pre-existing visual types rather than on direct knowledge of his text. While this conclusion no longer requires the same level of literacy among visual artists, it also exposes the potential philological biases in Knox' claims about the dependency of artistic images on literary sources. His cultural elevation of individual artists threatens to obscure the importance of independent traditions of visual representations of mythological subjects. Hodske himself connects the sudden popularity of Narcissus not with literary tastes but erotic ones, specifically a new preference for naked portraits of adolescent males (2007, 51) after the chaster subjects of the Third Style; for him, Narcissus is less an illustration of Ovid than a formal equivalent to Cyparissus, whose body is displayed in exactly the same pose. Finally, the programs in which these paintings appear, as in the House of Octavius Quartio, can be read as much more than literary assemblages. Thus Platt 2002 argues for a religious, specifically Isiac, significance to this choice of scenes. While such re-purposing of subjects from the *Metamorphoses* can be construed as a brilliant act of reception, especially given the importance of various epiphanies of other divinities in the scenes featured, it also shows that there were many more influences at work in putting together even this most Ovidian visual suite of images. In sum, while I must allow for the possibility that any individual painted Narcissus responds to Ovid's version of the story, this by no means rules out the influence of a purely visual tradition of representation that is at least equally important (paintings were not simply illustrations of texts), nor does it preclude Ovid's own account having been informed by an awareness of Narcissus as an artistic subject as well as the visual potential of the narrative itself.

78. In the epithet (*Oedipodioniae*) Pythagoras uses for Thebes at 15.429.

79. For the figurative presence of the mask in the subsequent narrative, that of Actaeon, whose relationship to his appearance, thanks to the metamorphosis effected by Diana, resembles that between an actor and his mask, see Gildenhard and Zissos 1999, 173, and the discussion of Hardie 2002, 169.

80. Calame 2005, 104–18, esp. pp. 114–5.

81. For Zanker, who considers the 'self-conscious' Narcissus as a later variant of the youth who does not recognize his image, the only secure indication of the date of the change in the myth is the development of a characteristic gesture of self-exposure in the visual iconography of the figure. He dates this change to the late Hellenistic period (p.168) and therefore sees it as reflected in Ovid's narrative rather than originating with it.

82. This analysis draws from and I hope complements the thesis of Elsner 1996 that 'the story of Narcissus combines two self-deceptions crucial to the dynamics of naturalism' (p. 249= Elsner 2007, 136–7) in believing both that the image is real and that it is himself.

83. Also observed by Bartsch 2006, 95 n.121, citing Balensiefen 1990, 50–54 and 83–84.

84. On this phenomenon in paintings of Narcissus, see Elsner 2007, 167–8.

85. For the debate about the identity of the owner of this house, also attributed to Loreius Tiburtinus, see Platt 2002, 108 n.7.

86. See the account of Platt 2002, 91–2.

87. Elsner 2007, 155–60.

88. On such assemblages, see Knox 2014, 41–51. Platt 2002 gives a full analysis of this visual program as an exploration of the epiphanic power of viewing, with many references to its points of contact with Ovid's narratives.

89. Elsner 2007, 160.

90. Valladares 2012, 384. See also Elsner 2007, 168, with earlier citations, and Platt 2002, 92–3.

91. Hales 2007, 338. The entire article well explores the significance of Dionysiac viewing in Pompeian houses, treating Dionysiac imagery as transformative rather than merely decorative. Platt's (2002) interpretation of the visual program in this house focuses rather on the figure of Isis.

92. Elsner 2007, 160.

93. By site director Massimo Osanna, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/14/world/europe/pompeii-narcissus-fresco.html>.

94. One referee rightly points out the incongruity of a tragic mask becoming the source of desire. And yet in other ways as well the signs of grief and madness in the scene are translated into aesthetically ravishing visual images. This is, after all, the moment when Narcissus' beating of his breast produces the exquisite visual effect of contrasting red and white that in turn evokes naturalistic painting (3.480–90). Similarly, the wasting away of his body (3.492) that results from the sight of this beauty seems not only to create another sort of doubled sign (note especially the draining of color, 3.491), but renders somewhat surprising the persistence of the *caput* he lays in the green grass. This reduction of a body to a head anticipates in a different register the fate of Pentheus, whose final appearance in the poem is as a torn-off head, embraced by his mother Agave (*avulsumque caput*, 3.727). And this is in turn a visual premonition of the scene in the *Bacchae* where Agave enters with a thyrsus bearing that head, which would surely have been a represented by a mask (1165ff.).

95. 'And his form is returned back to him, rendered obscure by the movement of the lake'. The echo comes in the distorted repetition of *rediit in reddita*.

96. *florem* occurs in the same line position, six lines later, and the resemblance to *forma* is heightened in the next line, when the flower is broken down into its constituent *foliis*. *Folium* is attested to mean pages of a book no earlier than Suet. *frag.* 135.6; however, the content of that fragment, a dispute about whether this use derives from the likeness of pages to leaves or from their being made from animal skins (*follibus*), suggests that this meaning was at least available earlier.

97. *In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas*. For the deforming play on the Greek title *Metamorphoses*, see Wheeler 2009, 149, and note Ovid's own later references to the poem as *mutatae ... formae* (*Trist.* 1.1.117) and *carmina mutatas hominum dicentia formas* (*Trist.* 1.7.13); see Hinds 1985.

98. Butler 2011, 77. He is here speaking specifically of the tablet, whose waxy substance provides a direct point of comparison to the material of encaustic painting, but he had previously spoken of how even papyrus 'is neither flat nor smooth' (pp. 75–6).

ABSTRACTS

This article explores the representation and thematic importance of time within Ovid's account of Narcissus. It argues that perceiving Narcissus for the characters within Ovid's narrative

provokes a recognition of the experience of time that becomes central to both the tragic and erotic aspects of his story. In presenting Narcissus as both the subject of a diachronic narrative and a static image, Ovid at once uses the medium of his representation to illustrate his theme and makes his poem a mirror in which his own audience can apprehend the mutability of time.

INDEX

Keywords: Metamorphoses, Time/temporality, Ekphrasis, Tragedy, Mimesis, Lucretius, Dionysus, Roman Wall Painting, Aristotle, Oedipus, Word/image