



Narcissus and Echo

Narcissus [nar-SIS-is] was a handsome young man. He was so good-looking all the young girls who saw him wanted to be his, but he would have nothing to do with them. Even Echo [EK-oh], most beautiful of the nymphs, did not attract him, though she was desperately in love with him.

Echo was a follower and favorite of the Huntress, Diana [die-AN-uh], but even Diana could not protect her against the spite and malice of a more powerful goddess, Juno [JOO-noh]. Juno was involved in her usual activity of trying to find out what Jove was doing. She suspected he was interested in one of the nymphs, but she had no idea which. Juno went spying and looking. She encountered Echo and for a few minutes was amused and distracted by that beauty's happy, lively talk. Then, since she couldn't find anyone else to bully, she decided to punish Echo. The innocent girl's punishment was this: she was never to talk again except to repeat what someone else said to her. Juno told her she could use her tongue to speak the last word, but never to speak first. Of course, a lot of people would rather have the last word, but this was tough on Echo, who loved to chatter.

One day Narcissus was calling out to his friends, "Anyone here?" And Echo, under the spell of Juno, answered, "Here—here," happy because she thought the lad was calling to her. She was still hidden behind the trees so he couldn't see her. He shouted, "Come!," thinking it was one of his buddies, and of course she echoed, "Come!" and then stepped out with her arms lovingly extended to hug him. But he scorned her and turned aside. "No," he said, "I'm not going to let you take possession of me!" All she could say, appealingly, was "Take possession of me!" But by then he was gone. Poor Echo, ashamed and humiliated, wasting away until only her voice remained, hid herself in caves, where she can still be heard.

Narcissus went his own way, being loved by all the fair young girls and loving none. Perhaps he just wanted to be free, but he had to pay a price for it. Eventually, one of the girls he had rejected sent up a prayer to the gods: that he who could not love others should love only himself. Nemesis [NEM-uh-sis],



Narcissus was punished for being so self-centered by the goddess Nemesis.

Diana = Artemis

*Juno = Hera
Jove = Zeus*



Juno



Nemesis

the great goddess of righteous anger and justice, answered the prayer. As Narcissus leaned over a pool of water to drink, he was so taken with his own beautiful reflection that he gazed and gazed, transfixed, hypnotized as it were, by his own good looks, in a sense worshipping his own image. He knew now how others had suffered from his fatal charm. His punishment for his vanity was that he could never leave that image in the pool. Only death could free him from himself. And so it was. Never moving, he lay there until he died. His last words were to his reflected image, "Farewell—farewell." Echo, nearby, could do nothing to help him. All she could do was repeat his words, "farewell," saying goodbye to her beloved who had refused to be her lover.

It is said that when his shade (spirit) passed over the water that surrounds the realm of the dead, it leaned over Charon's [KARE-onz] boat to see itself for the last time reflected in the River Styx. Even in death, Narcissus could not forget himself. Nemesis had punished him, but he had learned nothing from the punishment. That was his sad fate.

But the lovely young maidens, the nymphs, whom he had rejected, were kind to him. They looked for his body to bury it, but could not find it. Where he had lain by the pool they found a beautiful new flower with bright colors and a strong but sweet fragrance. Still loving the youth who had caused them so much pain, they named the flower Narcissus.

Repeat the story:

1. What do we mean when we say that someone has a "fix" on himself or herself?

3. What is the scientific explanation for echoes?

Identify:

Echo

Narcissus

Nemesis

Define:

vanity

narcissistic