Ovid's Narcissus: An Echo of the Oedipus 'Complex'

1. Narcissistic Thebes?

The tales of Echo and Narcissus, while mutually enhancing each other in their magnificently suggestive symmetries,[1] have long been considered an oddity in their larger narrative context. Otis, for instance, is not alone in feeling that they are quite "extraneous" to the Theban milieu which dominates this particular stretch of the *Metamorphoses*, since they seem only superficially linked to the tragic city through the figure of Tiresias.[2] Some scholars have tried to solve the problem of their inclusion in Ovid's *Thebaid* (3.1-4.603) by pointing to thematic correspondences that connect "Narcissus and Echo" to other episodes in the narrative vicinity, such as fatal love,[3] the intervention of a vengeful divinity,[4] or the problematization of sight.[5] Yet citing sequences of thematic patterns, a generally fairly obvious and rather ubiquitous "surface phenomenon" that can be traced in various ways throughout the entire poem, hardly ever explains Ovid's poetry in and of itself.[6] Its presence should therefore not be considered a sufficient justification for Ovid's rendition of the Narcissus and Echo episodes at this point in the poem. Nor should one invoke poetic license (another favorite recourse of Ovidian scholars when confronted with a seemingly baffling authorial decision) as does Bömer when he suggests that Ovid here merely branches out into the wider mythology of Boeotia (Narcissus being a Boeotian youth).[7] Rather, here, as elsewhere, the well-constructed narratological enigmas of the *Metamorphoses* are rooted in the peculiar logic of Ovidian poetics.

Within the narrative evolution of Ovid's Theban history, the odd presence of Narcissus is not the only puzzling feature. The narrative is here constructed around a truly remarkable absence as well. For as Froma Zeitlin has demonstrated in a seminal essay, the imagination

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[1] The combination of their fates is generally assumed to be an Ovidian invention. Cf. Kenney (1986) 392.
[2] Otis (1966) 000.
[3] Schmidt (1991) 111-2.
[4] For the significance of this theme in Ovid's Theban cycle, see Hardie (1990) passim.
[5] For a graphic illustration of the recurrence of this theme throughout Ovid's *Thebaid*, cf. Cancik (000) 000.
[6] The best work by far on the topic of thematic patterning in the *Metamorphoses* is Schmidt (1991). Yet even his very flexible analysis of Ovid's *Themenführung*, a concept borrowed from music, is unable to explain the presence and function of the Narcissus and Echo episodes in their wider context (cf. his discussion on p.111f.), ultimately showing the limitations of this line of approach when it comes to understanding the poetics of a specific passage (which is, admittedly, not Schmidt's interest).
[7] Bömer (1969) 000.

of Attic drama, which underwrites this particular stretch of the *Metamorphoses*, mainly employs three clusters of myth in reckoning Thebes on the tragic stage: the events surrounding Cadmus' arrival in Boeotia and his founding of the city; the house of Laios, in particular the story of his son Oedipus; and the conception and birth of Dionysos as well as his confrontation with his cousin Pentheus when returning to his maternal city.[8] Now the third book of the *Metamorphoses*, which contains the first half of Ovid's Theban narrative, is obviously modelled to some degree on the structuring principles which the tragic playwrights employed in fashioning a coherent narrative of Theban mythology. The book duly opens with a restaging of Thebes' *ktisis*-legend (3.1-130), and the *sparagmos* of Pentheus provides the appropriate closure (3.511-733), set up and anticipated by the Semele episode (3.253-315). But Ovid, seemingly inexplicably, excludes the house of Laios from consideration, skipping over a vital part of the city's basic mythology. Even more surprising, he does not make up for this peculiar omission elsewhere in the poem.[9] The absence of any extended reference to the myth of Oedipus in his otherwise rather comprehensive treatment of ancient mythology is a particularly striking silence in the *Metamorphoses* and requires an explanation.

As it turns out, the glaring absence of Oedipus and the baffling presence of Narcissus are flip-sides of the same problem, and, considered together, point towards its proper resolution. At first glance it certainly appears that Ovid bodly swerves from his all but predetermined narrative path by recounting the episode of Narcissus at the very juncture when the narrative context of Theban legend calls for the appearance of an Oedipal figure. Yet the poet does not simply efface the horizon of expectation that he had so carefully established by the evolving sequence of Theban tales. As has been suggested by Loewenstein and Hardie, Ovid in fact uses the figure of Narcissus to render vicariously the thematic complex of Oedipus by relating Narcissus to the most powerful literary representation of Oedipus' fate, Sophocles *Oedipus Tyrannus*.[10] In the present paper, we would like to build on this suggestion and explore a little further the precise modalities by which Ovid turns Sophocles' Oedipus and his own Narcissus into the tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee of an extraordinary intertextual dynamic.

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[8] Zeitlin (000) passim.

[9] The only mention of his name occurs in Pythagoras' discourse in Book 15 where he calls Thebes *Oedipodioniae* (15.429).

[10] Cf. Loewenstein (1984) 33-56 passim, to whose perceptive analysis our own reading is much endebted and Hardie (1989) 86: "Behind the Narcissus story there hovers the figure of the Sophoclean Oedipus, the glaring absence from the narrative surface of Ovid's Theban books, *Metamorphoses* 3 and 4, but a ghostly presence in much of the drama of blindness, sight, and insight, particularly of the third book."

2. Establishing the intertextuality

An intertextual relation, especially one as seemingly arbitrary as that between Sophocles' *O.T.* and Ovid's Narcissus narrative needs to be marked if it is to be appreciated by the audience.[11] Ovid does so by introducing the figure of Tiresias into his text right before the tale of Narcissus, recounting an old version (dating back to Hesiod) of how Tiresias acquired his gift of prophecy.[12] Through his habit of striking copulating snakes with his stick on sight Tiresias had once been transformed from man to woman and back again, enabling him to experience sex as both man and woman. He is therefore called upon by Jupiter and Juno to mediate a little quarrel that had flared up in Heaven over nectar about which partner in carnal congress derives the greater amount of sexual pleasure. Deciding in favor of the female party, Tiresias is struck blind by the infuriated Juno, but is in turn granted knowledge of the future by a well-pleased Jupiter in recompense (cf. *Met.* 3.316-338).

This peculiar episode adumbrates the ambiguous terms on which Ovid establishes a transference of meaning from Sophocles' play into the *Metamorphoses*. On the one hand, the timely narrative entrance of the omniscient seer who haunts theater-scripts in general and Sophocles' *O.T.* in particular is the perfect set up for the thematic correlations that Ovid constructs between the Theban king and the Boeotian youth. Yet at the same time, the sharp contrast between the old and somewhat embittered Tiresias of the *O.T.*, who curses his wisdom (cf. 316f.) and is even suspected of participating in a political intrigue, and the Ovidian expert on male and female orgasm nicely prefigures the translation of tragic subject matter into the sphere of the erotic as well. As behooves a prophet, Tiresias thus foreshadows the narrative terms and intertextual poetics of the upcoming episode, both inaugurating a conceptual space within the *Metamorphoses* in which Ovid can rehearse Oedipal configurations and anticipating the erotic discontent in the transtextual relationship of Narcissus and the Theban king.

Tiresias continues to promote the Oedipus connection within the Narcissus narrative proper. Asked by the anxious nymph Liriope whether her son Narcissus would reach old age, the seer cryptically responds with an adaptation of the Apollinic maxim *gnothi seauton*. Narcissus will only enjoy a long life *si se non noverit* - if he does not know

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[11] For a good discussion of the marking of intertextuality, see Broich (1985) 31-47.

[12] For the sources, see Bömer (1969) 000. Cf. now also the article by O'Hara on a Hellenistic poem of the 1st century B.C.E. on Tiresias' multiple sex-changes (TAPA 1996).

himself (3.348).[13] By alluding in his first prophecy to this famous Delphic saying, Tiresias invokes a narrative background defined by the numinosity of Apollo and his oracle at Delphi which loom so large over Sophocles' drama as well. In fact, at the very moment when Iocaste figures out the truth, she tries to counter Oedipus' obsessive and self-destructive search for his true identity with an inversion of the Delphic "Know Thyself" which is exactly analogous to Tiresias' response to Liriope: ὦ δύσποτμ', εἴθε μήποτε γνοίης ὃς εἶ (*O.T.* 1068). Like Ovid's Tiresias, Iocaste reinterprets the Delphic imperative in an existential sense and inverts its message, as she tries to prevent the unfolding disaster of self-knowledge and introspective doom. Tiresias' prophecy about Narcissus' fate thus signals from the very outset that a typically Oedipean dialectic of blindness and insight is inscribed into the life of Ovid's protagonist as well.

Furthermore, in tragic discourse arguably the paramount source of Tiresias' aura and fame is his affiliation with the catastrophe of the house of Laios. Oedipus' dismissive taunt about the seer's abilities at 390 (ἐπεὶ φέρ' εἰπέ, ποῦ σὺ μάντις εἶ σαφής;) has been satisfactorily answered by the end of the play, and Tiresias' knowledge of Oedipus' true identity and his crimes is the outstanding monument to the dire credibility Apollo and his seer enjoy in Greek mythology. Conversely, Tiresias' status as a prophet in the *Metamorphoses* derives first and foremost from his involvement with the fate of Narcissus. Through a deceptively nonchalant, i.e. typically Ovidian, transition, the entire Narcissus episode appears to be introduced into the narrative merely to show the unfailing veracity of Tiresias' predictions. Appropriately, the tale is framed by references to his wide-spread celebrity, which is based precisely on his correct articulation of Narcissus' terms of existence (cf. 3.339-40 and 511-2).[14] In short, the figure of Tiresias and the specter of the Delphic oracle squarely situate Ovid's tale of Narcissus within Sophocles' Oedipal imagination, from the very beginning delimiting the textual boundaries of the static epyllion through a dynamic, intertextual "frame-up."

3. Exploring the Intertextuality

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[13] Cf. the discussion of Cancik (000) 47f., who emphasizes that in Ovid the original theological and moral implications of the saying are lost in favor of a new psychological, existential significance. Ovid here also rewrites his earlier poetry and dogma. Cf. *Ars* 2.497-501, where Apollo appears to the poet and reapplies his doctrine to the pursuit of love: *qui sibi notus erit, solus sapienter amabit* (501).

[14] Cf. Brenkman (1976) 325: "We thus find Tiresias stationed at either end of the mythos and presiding over its meaning, the figure of the narrative's truth", who, however, does not link Tiresias to the Sophoclean intertext.

The intertextual extravaganza Ovid stages between his own text and Sophocles' is not characterized by specific verbal resonances but rather by structural and thematic parallels which are further embedded within a consistent program of generic displacements. As Ovid reconfigures Oedipal constellations within his poem, he reproduces the plot structure, the primary tropes and the central thematics of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, but projects the politico-tragic fate of Sophocles' protagonist inversely into the domain of private passion located within a bucolic landscape. The intricate grammar of intertextual transformation that underpins and regulates Ovid's Narcissistic adaptation of the Sophoclean play thus divides into two principle modes of operation. The one can be classified as "analogical," the other as "dialogical."

a) analogical relations

The most striking correspondences between Sophocles' *O.T.* and Ovid's Narcissus episode involve the plot-structure of their dramas. Both writers construed a plot that meets the highest Aristotelian standards for tragic quality. In each case, the moment of recognition, i.e. the change from ignorance to knowledge, coincides with the plot's *peripeteia*, the reversal of the protagonist's fortune.[15] As Jebb points out, this climactic moment of discovery should be "naturally prepared, approached by a process of rising interest, and attended in the moment of fulfillment with the most astounding reversal of a previous situation."[16] Ovid's narrative technique displays precisely these qualities, as he restages *in nuce* the dramatic movement for which Sophocles is universally admired. Narcissus' encounter with Echo (3.356-401), the fatal curse of a rejected lover (3.402-406), and an elaborate ecphrasis of the fateful pond (3.407-412) set the stage for Narcissus' drama of self-recognition played out from 3.415 to 505. When Narcissus reaches the silent water and lies down to refresh himself he is gradually overwhelmed by a new desire:

dumque sitim sedare cupit, sitis altera crevit
dumque bibit, visae conreptus imagine formae
spem sine corpore amat, corpus putat esse, quod unda est.
(3.415-7)

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[15] Cf. Aristotle, *Poetics* 10-11.
[16] Jebb (1883) xvii.

Silent fascination, gazing and fruitless attempts at embracing his mirror-image, narrated in the third person (3.418-31), give way to an authorial address, in which Ovid lectures his character on the phenomenon of reflection (*Credule, quid frustra simulacra fugacia captas?* ... 3.432-6). This is followed by a long soliloquy (3.442-73) in which Narcissus works out his delusions. His initial puzzlement at the reciprocal behavioral patterns and the expressive desire of his mirror image all of a sudden yields to the crucial insight: *iste ego sum* (3.463), when he observes that no sounds penetrate to his ears although his illusive double seems to utter words in return to his own: there is no sound, no echo, and the hoped-for other collapses into himself. Oedipus' change from blindness to insight is a constituent feature of the myth as such, but it was probably Ovid who first dramatized the transition from an unconscious to a conscious Narcissus, producing a version which inserts his protagonist firmly within the tragic imagination.[17]

The reversals in fortune Oedipus and Narcissus experience in the course of their myths are quite dramatic. At the beginning of the Sophoclean play, the audience encounters Oedipus at the height of his powers, the heroic king and savior of Thebes; after his self-identification he has to realize that he in fact is the lowliest of humans, an incestuous parricide. Narcissus is initially presented as the cynosure of erotic attention, equal to the gods in beauty (cf. 3.421), yet ensconced within a haughty aloofness which seems to remove him from the sphere of ordinary human passion. But at the end we leave him in piteous self-absorption, as he vainly and eternally gazes upon himself in the waters of Styx.[18]

It is the trope of paradox, a figure of speech based on the unity of contradictions, which lies at the heart of Oedipus' as well as Narcissus' fate. The reversal Oedipus undergoes from king to scapegoat, "from citizen to exile; from dispenser of justice to criminal; from clairvoyant and savior of the city to blind riddle, bringer of plague to the city; from best, most powerful, wealthy and famous to most unfortunate, worst of men, a defilement and horror"[19] is ultimately rooted in the paradoxical nature of his social position: Oedipus is husband and son to his father's wife as well as father and brother to his mother's children.

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[17] Cf. Zanker (1966) on whose study the incisive comment of Hardie is based: "Ovid, perhaps for the first time, combines two versions of the Narcissus story, one in which the boy does not realize that it is himself he loves, and another in which the self-infatuation is fully conscious. There is thus engineered an ἀναγνώρισις of a tragic kind; knowledge of the ἁμαρτία leads to self-destruction" (1989) 86.

[18] Henderson, following Zeitlin, conceives of Thebes as "a system entropically closed, folded up from articulation and locked into self-absorption" (1993) 158. What better substitute could Ovid have chosen for Oedipus, the paradigmatic representative of tragic Thebes, than the narcissistic youth?

[19] Goldhill (000) 210.

At *O.T.* 1213-15, the chorus articulate the paradoxical disaster of Oedipus' life through poignant polyptotic word play which underscores his paradoxical status: ἐφηῦρέ σ' ἄκονθ' ὁ πάνθ' ὁρῶν χρόνος,/ δικάζει τὸν ἄγαμον γάμον πάλαι/ τεκνοῦντα καὶ τεκνοῦμενον. In turn, the Narcissistic version of the Oedipal paradox translates Oedipus' collapse of social distinctions into the inverse dilemma of trying to proliferate the self as other. Narcissus' reversal of fortune is thus based on the paradoxical fact that he is both lover and beloved at the same time, desperately and vainly calling for a split in his identity: *o utinam a nostro secedere corpore possem! votum in amante novum: vellem, quod amamus, abesset!* (3.467-8).

In fact, paradox advances to something of a "mastertrope" in both Sophocles' *O.T.* and Ovid's Narcissus' episode. Before their paradoxical essence becomes apparent to the two protagonists themselves, they "resolve" the contradictions inherent in their social position and character by projecting them onto an illusory other, a strategy that sustains and enriches the respective plot of the two texts until the final *anagnoriseis*. As soon as Oedipus receives the news from the Delphic oracle that, in order to vanquish the plague which oppresses Thebes, the murderer of Laios needs to be banished from the land, he commits himself to a relentless search. In effect, of course, this means that Oedipus throughout the play hunts himself, pursuing the same specter of otherness as Narcissus does when he falls in love with his mirror image, trying in vain to embrace his spectral double through the surface of the water. As Zeitlin put it: "In his search for the murderer, Oidipous at first can also be said to see double: he imagines that there is an other, a stranger, but discovers that the other was only a fugitive phantom of the self."[20] In other words, Oedipus and Narcissus, in their active - passive schizophreny that results from their envisioning the self as other, are both subject and object of their quests, hunter and hunted at the same time. Ovid brilliantly captures the ensuing paradoxical constellations in his sophisticated play with the genera of his verbs, when describing the enraptured Narcissus: *se cupit imprudens et, qui probat, ipse probatur,/ dumque petit, petitur pariterque accendit et ardet* (3.425-6).

The creation of an illusionary double who is assumed by the protagonists to be real situates the paradoxical nature of Oedipus and Narcissus within a wider metaphysics of seeming and being. Until the characters themselves acquire insight into their delusions, the joint presence of an authentic and inauthentic "reality" organizes not just the thematics of the plot - it also engenders dramatic irony. This figurative structure can best be defined as an imbalance in knowledge between either actor and audience or character and (omniscient)

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[20] Zeitlin (1990) 139.

narrator,[21] and in both texts, such an epistemological rupture runs through the central part of the drama. The trope enters into Sophocles' play at the moment when Oedipus begins to pursue the answer to the question: "Who killed Laios?" In Ovid, it is present the moment Narcissus unwittingly falls in love with his own mirror image.[22] In both cases, dramatic irony accompanies and sustains the development of the plot, which takes the protagonists from blindness to insight, blindness being a necessary precondition for this particular figure of speech, insight its proper resolution.[23]

This figurative mode is crucial for both Sophocles' and Ovid's composition and pervasive throughout their texts. Over and over, Oedipus unconsciously engages with his true identity, as his words manifest an implicit self-reflexivity.[24] The ambiguous referentiality of his discourse opens up the two levels of meaning which will ultimately collapse in the shocking disclosure of the truth. Vernant captures the essence of Oedipus-speak when he comments: "The only authentic truth in Oedipus' words is what he says without meaning to and without understanding it. In this way the twofold dimension of Oedipus' speech is an inverted reflection of the language of the gods as expressed in the enigmatic pronouncement of the oracle."[25] Narcissus' own outbursts when he admires himself while gazing into the pond exactly reenact the linguistic conflicts and the dramatic irony of Oedipus' double-speak. As with Oedipus, every one of Narcissus' exclamations while he is still in a state of ignorance about the true nature of his passion contains an implicit, self-referential irony:

> exigua prohibemur aqua! cupit ipse teneri!
> nam quotiens liquidis porreximus oscula lymphis,
> hic totiens ad me resupino nititur ore;

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[21] Cf. the definition in *The Princeton Encylcopedia of Literary Criticism*, 635: "Dramatic irony is a plot device according to which (a) the spectator know more than the protagonists; (b) the character reacts in a way contrary to that which is appropriate or wise; (c) characters of situations are compared or contrasted for ironic effects, such as parody; or (d) there is a marked contrast between what the character understands about his acts and what the play demonstrates about them."

[22] Ovid recreates the two levels of knowledge between (ignorant) actor and (knowing) audience as an epistemological hierarchy between authorial voice and character by assuming a didactic stance towards the unwitting Narcissus modelled on Lucretius. Cf. esp. 3.432-436 with the discussion of Hardie (1989) passim.

[23] Dramatic irony cast into cosmic dimensions turns into tragic irony: "The contrast of the individual and his hopes, wishes, and actions, on the one hand, and the workings of the dark and unyielding power of fate, on the other, is the proper sphere of tragic irony." (PELC) Oedipus' vain struggle to escape the terms of existence laid down by the divine oracle is a paradigmatic example of this trope. In Ovid, the goddess Nemesis introduces the inevitability of fate and a shadow of tragic irony into the text (see below).

[24] Cf. e.g. *O.T.* 137-140 with Jebb's note.

[25] Vernant (000) 116. Oedipus' confrontation with the seer Tiresias pinpoints the clash of these two realities, one human, the other divine, in Sophocles' *O.T.* In this long scene (316-462), Oedipus who mocks Tiresias for his handicap (cf. 368-372), ironically reveals his own ethical and intellectual blindness.

posse putes tangi: minimum est, quod amantibus obstat.
quisquis es, huc exi! quid me, puer unice, fallis
quove petitus abis? certe nec forma nec aetas
est mea, quam fugias, et amarunt me quoque nymphae.

In a trenchant recapitulation of the linguistic presence of two realities throughout most of the texts, both heroes are ultimately confronted with the implications of their own language. "It is the gods who send Oedipus' own speech back at him, deformed or twisted around, like an echo (*sic*) to some of his own words."[26] And Narcissus, who at 390-1 haughtily rejects Echo (*'manus conplexibus aufer!/ ante' ait 'emoriar, quam sit tibi copia nostri*) laments his own fate with a mocking echo of his previous arrogance: *quod cupio, mecum est: inopem me copia fecit*, 3.466). As Vernant suggests, the irony of tragedy "may consist in showing how, in the course of the action, the hero finds himself literally 'taken at his word', a word that recoils against him, bringing him bitter experience of the meaning he was determined not to recognize."[27] Oedipus as well as Narcissus are thus at the center of two worlds: one which they construct for themselves and which turns out to be illusory, the other real which will annihilate their existence once they enter it.[28]

Finally, Sophocles and Ovid provide a similar explanation and justification for the miserable destiny of their protagonists. In a choral ode that is crucial for the meaning and message of the drama (863-910), the chorus associate Oedipus with that fatal character trait in a tragic universe, overweening arrogance. At the beginning of their first antistrophe, the chorus proclaims an axiom that informs the nomological knowledge of Athenian democracy - ὕβρις φυτεύει τύραννον (873). It then proceeds to utter an ominous prayer in the strophe wishing *kaka moira* upon anyone who behaves haughtily, has no regard for justice and shows no reverence for the images of the gods (883-87). These pronouncements are surely meant to be taken as a harsh critique of Oedipus, whose tyrannical demeanor is demonstrated throughout the play. He behaves unjustly towards fellow humans such as Tiresias and Creon and shows an appalling lack of piety towards the gods (esp. Apollo).[29]

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[26] Vernant (1988) 116.
[27] (1988) 114.
[28] One might add that both authors reproduce the inherent duality of their characters on the level of language. Their respective texts are full of *double entendres*, puns and chiastic reversals which underscore the dramatic situation linguistically. As Vernant points out, "no literary genre of antiquity made such full use of the *double entendre* as did tragedy and Oedipus Rex contains more than twice as many ambiguous expressions as Sophocles' other plays" (1988) 000. Conversely, arguably no other episode in the *Metamorphoses* is quite as richly textured with linguistic play as Echo and Narcissus.
[29] For a recent discussion of Oedipus' *hybris*, see Lefèvre (1987) 44-47, esp. 46f.: "So schwierig die sachliche Aussage des viel zitierten Verses 873 auch ist, scheint doch festzustehen, daß Oidipous der

In his own world, Narcissus displays similar arrogance, a point which Ovid embeds within a striking allusion to Catullus 62. Compare the following two passages:[30]

> multi illum iuvenes, multae cupiere puellae;
> sed (fuit in tenera tam dura superbia forma)
> nulli illum iuvenes, nullae tetigere puellae.
> (*Met.* 3.353-355)

> ut flos in saeptis secretus nascitur hortis,
> ...
> multi illum pueri, multae optavere puellae.
> idem cum tenui carptus defloruit ungui,
> nulli illum pueri, nullae optavere puellae:
> sic virgo, dum intacta manet, dum cara suis est;
> cum castum amisit polluto corpore florem,
> nec pueris iucunda manet nec cara puelli.
> Hymen o Hymenaee, Hymen ades o Hymenaee!
> (Cat. 62.39-48)

In addition to the sportive humor inherent in the playfulness of such allusive games, the immediate context and generic affiliation of the Catullan passage are intricately related to the thematic concerns of the Narcissus episode, providing a highly resonant frame for Ovid's introduction of the crucial concept of *superbia*, the Latin equivalent of *hybris*. In Catullus, the stanza is sung by a chorus of girls who use the flower simile to illustrate the virtues of chastity and, by implication, since the genre of Catullus 62 is a wedding hymn, meant to reinforce the *kairos* for the first sexual experience - which is, of course, the wedding night. The chorus argues that if a girl preserves her virginity she will receive honor and attention from boys and girls alike, if not, she will be ignored like a plucked and withered flower, whatever her former beauty and attraction.

While Ovid keeps the compact three line arrangement in the Catullan simile, he pointedly inverts the argument by altering the middle verse. Narcissus' mistake is the exact opposite

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τύραννος ist und demzufolge die dort genannte Hybris auf ihn bezogen werden muß" (with further bibliography).

[30] Dörrie, Farrell

of the girl who sacrifices her virginity before marriage. Because of his arrogance, he rejects all erotic advances and is unable to maintain a healthy balance between chastity and erotic experience. The intertext to Catullus underscores precisely this point. In sharp and striking contrast to the wedding hymn, performed in celebration of a lasting social contract and the prospect of lawful and timely sexual intercourse, Ovid's Narcissus scornfully rejects any interpersonal relationships and withdraws into haughty isolation. As Loewenstein put it: "Ovid's tale of Narcissus is an anti-epithalamium, for it resolves ambivalent human sexuality by restoring that original, floral sexlessness."[31] Narcissus' arrogant resistance to love is only broken when a rejected lover utters a prayer for disaster (3.402-6), triggering a Catullan finale of sorts as Narcissus withers away into a flower. The downfall of Narcissus is caused by the goddess Nemesis, worshipped at Rhamnusia in Attica (cf. 3.406: *adsensit precibus Rhamnusia iustis*) who parallels the *kaka moira* of Sophocles, invoked by the chorus as punishment for *hybristai*.

b) dialogical inversions

The analogies in plot structure, figurative texture and motivation by which Ovid dramatizes his tale of Narcissus along the model of Sophocles' *O.T.* are complemented by a consistent program of inverse variations through which Oedipus and Narcissus emerge as thematic mirror-reflections of each other. Sophocles tells the story of a king who rules over a powerful and famous *polis*. Ovid narrates an idyllic tale of youth and privacy in the woods and glens of a bucolic landscape. Oedipus is tormented by a conflict within the wider structures of his family. Ovid focuses instead on the introspective anguish of a lonely youth. The problematic sexuality which engages with a forbidden other is displaced by a sexual perversion rooted in fascination with the self. While Oedipus transgresses and perverts boundaries within a socio-political setting, Narcissus withdraws into the wild, refusing to engage in any social relation whatsoever. Sophocles' tragedy features a hero who is *isotheos* in council and power. The *Metamorphoses* puts on display a protagonist who is *isotheos* in beauty.[32] Oedipus' personal catastrophe is embedded within a wider network of political implications. Narcissus and Echo represent various facets of the drama of self-absorbing Love. Oedipus and Narcissus are thus looked into an inverse mimetic correlation, as Narcissus reenacts an Oedipal destiny and experiences the thematic concerns and plot structures of his tragic *alter ego* within the codes of erotic-elegiac discourse and a

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[31] (1984) 34.

[32] Cf. 3.420-1: *spectat humi positus geminum, sua lumina, sidus/ et dignos Baccho, dignos et Apolline crines ...*

pastoral environment.[33] The script written for a tragic performance on the stage of a Greek theater, an occasion highly charged with civic relevance, has become an epyllic inset within a peculiar Roman epic, arguably written primarily for pleasure and entertainment.

4. Reflecting on the intertextuality

Ovid captures the semantic operations initiated by the intertextual dialectic of identity and difference, contrast and assimilation in the figure of Echo and the pond in which Narcissus mirrors himself, thereby providing an allegorical commentary on his engagement of Sophocles' tragedy. That the figure of Echo can impersonate intertextual play is an old occurrence, starting, as far as we can gather, with Aristophanes *Thesmophoriazousae*, where Euripides plays the role of Echo, calling attention to the parodic imitations of his own tragedies which Aristophanes has sprinkled throughout the play.[34] In Ovid, her verbal exchange with Narcissus pinpoints arguably the most crucial feature of intertextual transposition, the consistency of the signifier and the semantic slippage of the signified. The stability of the signifier (which can range, as we have seen, from plot structure, to verbal texture to motivation) ensures that the intertextual gesture is recognizable, while the recontextualization of signifiers within a new (con)text alters their semantics. As Perri points out: "We know from acoustics that the echo is never the exact phonic equivalent of the original sound; just so, even a direct quotation, by appearing in a new context, is a 'distortion' of the marked text."[35]

Consider now the dramatic dialogue between Echo and Narcissus, a stichomythia played out at 3.380-392:

Narcissus:	ecquis adest?	Is someone there?
Echo:	adest!	Right here!
Narcissus:	veni!	Come!
Echo:	veni! (cf. vocat illa vocantem)	Come!

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[33] Cf. Zeitlin (1992) 148: "Once we grasp the import of autochthony and incest as the underlying patterns at Thebes, we can diagnose the malaise of the city, which has no means of establishing a viable system of relations and differences, either within the city or without, or between the self and the other." As it turns out, Oedipus, that paradigm of the Theban tragic man, is not only incestuous. He is also etymologically rooted in autochthony. As Lowell Edmunds has shown in an article that explores the connection between the cultic and the legendary Oedipus, his name suggests floric genealogy (1984) 234-236. It might also be worth pointing out that in Sophocles *O.C.* Oedipus comes to rest in a grove, sacred to Dionysos, in which the narcissus blooms (cf. *O.C.* 683).

[34] Cf. Zeitlin, Travesties, 181-194, esp. 191-2. For a history of the figure of Echo (in the double sense of person as well as trope) into modern times, see Hollander (000).

[35] (1978) 303f.

Narcissus:	quid me fugis?	Why do you flee me?
Echo:	quid me fugis?	Why do you flee me?
Narcissus:	huc coeamus!	Let us meet right here!
Echo:	coeamus!	Let's have sex!
Narcissus:	ante emoriar, quam sit tibi copia nostri	I will die before I give you power over me
Echo:	sit tibi copia nostri	May I yield you power over me.

By reproducing the final sounds of her partner in dialogue Echo prefigures the intertextual design of the Narcissus episode. Her ardent verbal exchange with her beloved covers the entire gamut of the intertextual phenomenon, ranging from an exact reproduction of the original meaning, a clear parallelism in signification, to its radical inversion into the total opposite. The verbal interplay between Echo and Narcissus, with its curious doubling and refracting, thus illustrates Ovid's deft recalling and rewriting of Sophocles, representing as it does the mutual presence of two textual worlds, their interrelation, their reciprocal interdependence, their strong attraction and repulsion, in short: the entire thematic of Ovid's intertextual composition. As Froma Zeitlin has pointed out in her discussion of Aristophanes *Thesmophoriazousae*, "Echo, in fact, might stand as the mediating figure between tragedy and comedy, divided between them and yet bringing the genres together, as the artful device of the original model and the slapstick cliché of the comic theater."[36] In the *Metamorphoses* we again find Echo cast into the role of generic mediator, as she signposts Ovid's witty rendition of the genuinely tragic Oedipus in the guise of a Narcissus, whose melodramatic affliction of pathological self-love scintillates with tragic as well as comic nuances.

The mirroring pond complements Echo in Ovid's endeavor to inscribe an allegorical commentary on his intertextual strategies into the narrative itself. As McCarty points out: "Like metaphor itself, mirroring both identifies and separates ... Indeed, the mirroring vision is precisely something that is *there* yet also *not there*, hence it challenges the mentality that thinks in terms of here and there or self and not-self."[37] Not only does the coexistence of affirmation and negation of reality present in mirroring constitute a peculiarly apposite metaphor for the pathological reflexivity of Oedipus and Narcissus who, as we have seen, double their selves as others. On a metapoetic level, mirroring raises also the same ontological and epistemological issues of presence and absence as does Ovid's

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[36] Travesties, 192.
[37] (1989) 162.

intertextual construction of Narcissus as an Oedipal figure. For Oedipus both is and is not in Ovid's text. By making Narcissus the mirror image of Sophocles' Oedipus, Ovid instantiates an intertextual "catoptrics" of identity and inversion between the two heroes. Just as a mirror "establishes a paradoxical relationship of correspondence and opposition between beholder and external things,"[38] Ovid establishes an inverse dialectic of identity and difference, contrast and assimilation between his own protagonist and that of his pretext.

In antiquity, the mirror was seen as "a means of access and a bridge to other worlds."[39] In Ovid, we find this belief textualized. Sophocles' tragedy not only serves as a dramatic prism through which we can illuminate the intertextual depth of the Narcissus narrative. Ovid's text in turn also affords insights into the poetics and the imagination of his model, whose fictional world Ovid enables us to re-experience in disguise across boundaries of culture, space and time. The high degree of autoreflexivity - which is so emblematic of "Echo and Narcissus" and which underscores the essential features present in any intertextual composition - turns this episode into a narrative phenomenology of intertextuality.

5. Conclusion

It goes without saying that "Echo and Narcissus" can be (and often has been) read as an entirely self-sufficient and independent textual unit, sealed off from the concerns of the wider narrative context. Yet such a reading misses the intertextual fabric of Ovid's narrative and hence the sophisticated artistry of his poetics. As polished and self-contained as Ovid's epyllic gems might seem at first sight, their texture is almost always multi-layered, recapitulating larger generic concerns, referring back to previous poetry, or thematizing other issues in Ovid's self-reflexive and continuous engagement with the possibilities of an imaginative poetics. Loewenstein eloquently summarizes the dialectic between the autonomy of individual episodes and their integration into the evolving patterns of the *carmen perpetuum*: "At its fullest, the tale of Echo and Narcissus is an erotic allegory of tensions at work in the poem as a whole, tensions between the mute introversions of narrative episode and the passionate glossolalia of *perpetuitas*."[40] In a sense, then, the

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[38] McCarty (1989) 165, to whom we are also indebted for the neologism "catoptrics."
[39] McCarty (1989) 169.
[40] Loewenstein (1984) 35-6.

Narcissus and Echo episodes epitomize the issue raised by the proem, i.e. how a work can be both continuous and well-polished, epic and epyllion at the same time.[41]

Considered from this wider narratological perspective, substituting Narcissus for Oedipus makes perfect sense in terms of Ovid's present poetic agenda. While the tales he narrates over the course of Book 3 and 4 nominally constitute his "Theban history," *de facto* he focuses his narrative interest not on the fate of the city as such, but on individual members of Cadmus' family, more specifically his four daughters and their respective sons. In a sophisticated patterning, Ovid starts his Theban tales with the fate of Actaeon, child of Autonoe, then proceeds to Semele (and her son Dionysos) before focusing on Pentheus, son of Agave, and concludes with Ino, Cadmus' fourth daughter, and her son Melicertes. Neither Oedipus nor any other event associated with the house of Laios would have lend itself easily for inclusion in this tight-knit patterning of Cadmus' daughters and nephews. The Narcissus interlude thus smoothly integrates the prime member of the Labdakid family, such a vital dimension of Theban mythology, through intertextual analogy into the narrative, without infringing upon Ovid's general concern with the house of Cadmus.[42]

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[41] Coleman, Kenney, Hofmann, Hinds, Heyworth.

[42] The other obvious interruption of the Cadmus story are the tales of the Minyeides which display their own poetic logic. We hope to treat them elsewhere in due course.