

**NARCISSUS AND  
ECHO**

**STILL A BETTER LOVE STORY**



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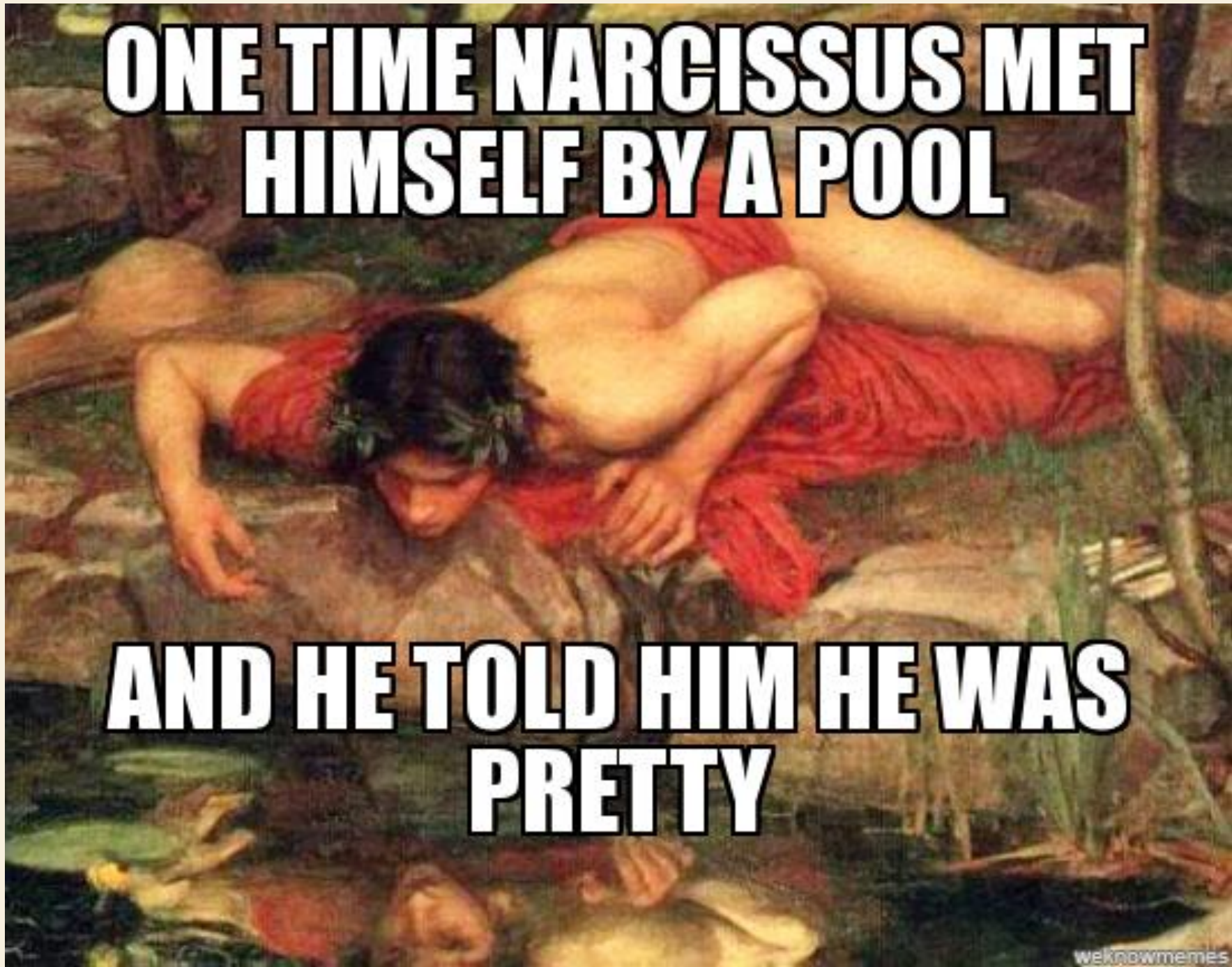
**BUT FIRST**



**LET ME TAKE A SELFIE**



**ONE TIME NARCISSUS MET  
HIMSELF BY A POOL**



**AND HE TOLD HIM HE WAS  
PRETTY**



# SUMMARY

- Echo is a beautiful, young dryad whose only downfall is that she talks too much.
- One afternoon, Hera comes looking for Zeus, afraid that he's out frolicking with the nymphs again.
  - Zeus does a lot of frolicking, if you know what I mean.
- As it happens, Echo is on hand to stall Hera with mindless chatter so that Zeus can escape. But when Hera realizes that she's being played, she's not psyched.
- As a punishment, Hera takes away Echo's voice so that she is only able to repeat whatever she hears.
  - Like, say, hearing your own echo in a canyon. *Hint, hint.*
- Echo falls hopelessly in love with Narcissus the moment she sees him, but because of Hera's curse, she can't say anything. Literally.

# SUMMARY

- Echo approaches Narcissus.
- He asks her for directions out of the wood, which leads to an annoying conversation of Echo repeating his words.
- Narcissus rejects Echo and leaves her.
- Heartbroken Echo prays to Aphrodite to take away her pain.
- Aphrodite makes Echo disappear, but Echo's voice remains.
- Aphrodite then swears vengeance upon Narcissus.
- Narcissus stumbles upon a small clearing with a stream.
- He kneels in the grass, and looks into the stream, and BAM. He catches sight of his reflection in the water and falls completely in love.



# SUMMARY

- At first Narcissus isn't smart enough to realize that the guy in the water is his reflection.
- Although, in all fairness, the ancient Greek world was full of some weird stuff.
  - Maybe he thought he was looking at a water spirit or something.
- In any case, he really wants to get his hands on his new love. He dips his arms into the pool and tries to grasp it.
- Nothing works, obviously.
- Confused, Narcissus starts talking to his reflection.
- Narcissus is just babbling at his reflection, and Echo's voice repeats everything back to Narcissus.
- In the end, Narcissus waited by the riverbank for so long he turned into a flower.



# THEME: PRIDE

- Okay. Greek and Roman mythology: we've got heroes slaying monsters, we've got Zeus throwing lightning, we've got warriors dying gloriously in battle, we've got a guy who thinks his reflection is so hot that he's willing to hang out by the pool and starve to death while he admires himself. Wait, what?
- There's actually a good reason why stories like Echo and Narcissus exist. While a large portion of mythology exists to record and glorify a culture's history—think *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*—there is no shortage of myths out there that serve as teaching tools.
- The first thing that the story of Echo and Narcissus teaches us is to beware the trap of vanity or self-adoration. Basically, don't go around thinking you're all that.

## Questions About Pride

- What kind of character is Narcissus? Vain and conceited? Tragic? Do you feel that Narcissus deserves his fate? Why or why not?
- What do myths like Echo and Narcissus suggest about the role of physical beauty in ancient culture? How is our modern understanding of beauty similar and/or different?

# THEME: LOVE

- Imagine that you're walking through the forest. You come around a bend into a clearing and there, right in front of you, is Brad Pitt [replace that image with Angelina Jolie if Brad Pitt isn't your type]. OMG it's Brad Pitt! Your head starts spinning. Has he seen you? What if he sees you? Is your makeup okay? Does your hair look good? Should you ask for his autograph? Maybe you can get a picture with him...
- This is how Echo feels when she first sees Narcissus: instant freak-out. Narcissus is the Greek Brad Pitt, and Echo falls head over heels at first sight. Being love struck on its own isn't a problem. Echo's problem is that she can't let go of her obsession, even after Narcissus has rejected her. She clings tightly to her desire long past any hope of fulfilling it, and that desire slowly eats away at her until only her voice remains. And there it is: the inherent danger of wanting what you can't or shouldn't have.
- Narcissus suffers the same fate to an even greater degree. In his case, he becomes obsessed with his own reflection. While Echo had at least a brief possibility of fulfilling her desire, Narcissus has no chance at all of ever getting what he wants. The best he can do is dunk his head into the water in a futile attempt to kiss himself. The story suggests that if he'd just been able to recognize it was hopeless and walk away, he might have lived a bit longer.

## Questions About Love and Lust

- Do you think Narcissus would have fallen in love with himself if he weren't beautiful? Would Echo have fallen in love with him if he weren't beautiful? Why or why not?
- What does the story of Echo and Narcissus suggest about the relationship between beauty and desire? What does this relationship teach us about ancient culture?
- Have you ever wanted something you couldn't have? What was it? How did it make you feel to be unable to obtain it?

# THEME: TRANSFORMATION

- Echo turns into an invisible voice
- Narcissus turns into a flower
- Cinderella's pumpkin turns into a coach
- Oops. Ignore that last one. Wrong story. *Ahem.* Transformation is actually a major theme of Ovid's *The Metamorphoses* as a whole. The word metamorphosis actually means "to change or transform."
- In the story of Echo and Narcissus, there are two major transformations: Echo becomes a bodiless voice and Narcissus becomes a flower. On the one hand, these transformations provide simple explanations for things that exist in the world. There really are echoes, and there really are flowers. Ovid probably thought it was fun explaining where stuff came from.
- But what's more interesting is that these transformations contrast the actions of the Ovid's characters. Both Echo and Narcissus fall in love, and neither of them is willing to give it up. They refuse to transform their feelings—they refuse to change. Instead, they die and their bodies do the changing. What the what? Seems like it would be easier to just to change your feelings. Or would it?

## Questions About Transformation

- What do you think Ovid's getting at with these transformations? Is he really just playing a game or is there something deeper going on? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Echo's voice lives on after her body dies? Do you think this transformation is justified? Why or why not?
- Why does Narcissus get to be a flower while Echo is just a voice? Who got the better deal? Why do you feel that way?

# NARCISSUS

- Recap: Narcissus is HOT. Brad Pitt hot. You know what, just picture the hottest person you can think of: that's Narcissus... You get the point? Unfortunately, he knows that he's hot, and he's super full of himself because of it. He rejects everyone who loves him, including the nymph Echo. Eventually the goddess Aphrodite punishes him big time.
- Deciding what to think of Narcissus can be kind of tough. On the one hand, he's a huge jerk. He's so completely full of himself that he doesn't have room in his life for anyone else. He says terrible, awful, mean things to Echo.
- Oh, and he seems a little——stupid? Yeah, he seems kind of stupid. Seriously, who falls in love with their own reflection, and then decides to stay? Yeah, yeah, Aphrodite is partially responsible, but that doesn't make it okay. Narcissus is clearly a little crazy.
- On the other hand, Narcissus is a deeply tragic figure. Think about it for a second. What has he actually done to deserve his fate? Is it wrong to want to be single? Should he be forced to hook up with every nymph that throws herself at him?
- What's more, when he does fall in love, he falls super deeply in love—so much so that he's willing to die. Isn't that what all people want? Someone who loves us to death? Some might say that his love is misguided, but that's no reason to hate the guy. Hey, Shakespeare made his entire career out of writing about misguided love.
- Here are a few other things he's inspired: there's the Narcissus flower, better known as the daffodil. Oh, and Narcissistic Personality Disorder. Can't forget about that one.



# ECHO

- *Recap: Echo is a supper chatty dryad. No one is entirely sure who her parents are, but here are key facts: (1) she lost her voice to Hera. (Really, what do you expect when you try to stop Hera from hunting down Zeus?); (2) she fell hard for Narcissus; (3) her mega-crush didn't work out well for her. And that's Echo in a nutshell.*
- On the surface Echo seems like a pretty straightforward character. She's the victim of the story, right? Readers are meant to identify with her and feel sorry for her. Really, who hasn't been rejected at some point in their life?
- Sure, Echo goes to some extreme measures in pursuing Narcissus. Sure, she goes a little crazy after she's rejected. But sometimes love makes us do crazy things, right? Come on, she's had her voice taken away from her and everything. Feel sorry for her!
- Either way, be grateful for this little nymph. Without her, we wouldn't be able to shout "Hello!" at the top of our lungs in the Grand Canyon and hear it echo—yep, Echo—right back.

- As with almost all of ancient Greek mythology, the story of Echo and Narcissus exists in a bunch of different forms.
- But the fact remains that most people who read this myth will read Ovid's version. Why? Because Ovid was just that good. *The Metamorphoses* is easily one of the best collections of ancient mythology available. It was also one of the most widely read books of the entire Middle Ages. *Quick pause for some biographical info about Ovid:*
- Publius Ovidius Naso (yep, that's Ovid) was born on March 20, 43 B.C.E., about 90 miles outside of Rome. He had the good fortune to be born into money (his father was rich) which, at that time, meant he received an excellent education. To his father's irritation, Ovid used his education to write poetry.
- Ovid was exiled from Rome in the year 8 C.E. People don't know for sure why he was exiled—it may or may not have had something to do with his poetry. Regardless, he is considered hands down one of the best poets of the Roman era.
- So, what's up with *The Metamorphoses* then? In short, Ovid's masterpiece is a collection of poems written in fifteen books (whew) and completed in the year 8 C.E. The poems make up a pseudo-history (fake history) of the world. They start at the creation of the universe and end with the assassination of Gaius Julius Caesar, on the Ides of March, 44 B.C.E.
- The Echo and Narcissus story is part of book three of *The Metamorphoses*. It's one of many, many stories about unrequited love that made it into the collection. What makes Echo and Narcissus stand out, then? Well, the main character loves *himself*, not someone else.
- Because of his love for himself, Narcissus made a huge splash in certain areas of literature, notably as inspiration for the character of Dorian Gray in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.