Echo and Narcissus

Characters:

Narcissus – egocentric, supercilious, selfish
Echo – talkative, silenced, fanatical,
Hera – wrong, controlling, vindictive

Significant Concepts:

Love
Egotism
Spying
Beauty
Evaporating

Symbols:

Sound
Mirrors
Nature

Summary:

Echo was a favorite of Artemis, the goddess of woods and wild creatures. But she came under the displeasure of a still mightier goddess, Hera herself, who was at her usual occupation of trying to discover what Zeus was about. She suspected that he was in love with one of the nymphs and she went to look them over to try to discover which. However, she was immediately diverted from her investigation by Echo’s gay chatter. As she listened amused, the others silently stole away. With her usual injustice she turned against Echo. The goddess condemned her never to use her tongue again except to repeat what was said to her. “You will always have the last word,” Hera said, “but no power to speak first.” This was very hard, but hardest of all when Echo loved Narcissus.

Narcissus is the son of the nymph Liriope. When Narcissus was a baby, his mother asked Tiresias if he would live a long life. Tiresias answered ‘He will, if he never knows himself’. As a youth, his beauty was so great, all the girls who saw him longed to be his, but he would have none of them. Even Echo did not move him. Since Echo could not speak to him, she followed him. While calling to his companions, Echo eagerly called back. She remained hidden by the trees, so he called for her to come. When Echo came from the woods, arms outstretched, Narcissus turned away in angry
disgust. She hid her blushes and her shame in a lonely cave, and never could be comforted. Soon, Echo wasted to a shadow, and her echoing voice only remains.

Eventually, Narcissus was requited for his cruelty. A lover rejected by him prayed to Nemesis, who condemned Narcissus to the contemplation of his own beauty reflected in a pool on Mount Helicon. The more he looked, the deeper he fell in love with himself. He lay day after day beside the pool, until he wasted away and died. The scorned nymphs were kind to him in death and sought his body to give it burial, but they could not find it. Where it had lain there was a new and lovely flower blooming, and they called it by his name, Narcissus.

*Literary Examples:*

**Personal Helicon**

Seamus Heaney

As a child, they could not keep me from wells
And old pumps with buckets and windlasses.
I loved the dark drop, the trapped sky, the smells
Of waterweed, fungus and dank moss.

One, in a brickyard, with a rotted board top.
I savoured the rich crash when a bucket
Plummeted down at the end of a rope.
So deep you saw no reflection in it.

A shallow one under a dry stone ditch
Fructified like any aquarium.
When you dragged out long roots from the soft mulch
A white face hovered over the bottom.

Others had echoes, gave back your own call
With a clean new music in it. And one
Was scaresome, for there, out of ferns and tall
Foxgloves, a rat slapped across my reflection.

Now, to pry into roots, to finger slime,
To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring
Is beneath all adult dignity. I rhyme
To see myself, to set the darkness echoing.

“She looks at herself instead of looking at you, and so doesn’t know you.”

(Margaret R.B. Shaw, 1953)

I am Narcissus, I know and see it, who so loved the shadow
of himself that he died of it upon the fountain.

(Norman Roman de Troie, 1165)
Echo
Daryl Hine

Echo that loved hid within a wood
Would to herself rehearse her weary woe:
O, she cried, and all the rest unsaid
Identical came back in sorry echo.

Echo for the fix that she was in
Invisible, distraught by mocking passion,
Passionate, ignored, as good as dumb,
Employed that O unchanged in repetition.

Shun love if you suspect that he shuns you,
Use with him no reproaches whatsoever.
Ever you knew, supposing him to know
No melody from which you might recover-

Cover your ears, dear Echo, do not hear.
Here is no supplication but your own,
Only your sighs return upon the air
Ere their music from the mouth be gone.

Mud and Dark Lyrics
Cocteau Twins

“Echo fell in love with the handsome narcissus
Narcissus struggles who heard walking
It was the nearest to perfection

"Is anyone here?" "Here here" "Come, come, I will beg you."
Before I give you power over me
I give you power over me

And that remains her fate, always her voice echoes
Still repeating only what others have said
Narcissus we both are ugly
For I dreamt for him to find, hold
A lovely face in the reflected image

Construed by the futile, befallen to have his affection
It turned her so slowly wasted
I know you didn't come to me to lay here

And that remains her fate, always her voice echoes
Still repeating only what others have said

And after that she hoped to come as he said
He's found it funny they all want to piss on her
And she repeated the same words to them

And echo's flesh has always start all again
And she bows down to starve to death
Oh, but she isn't thinking this before sinking

Is anyone here, here, here?
Come, come
I will die
Before I give you power over me
I give you power over me"

Sources:
