

Eleanore Lee

Elegy for Narcissus

One last time, one last time.
Surely this is the last time we'll weep at the sight of him.
See his eyes look out from the page,
As they once looked out from screen and stage.
Looked out but did not see.

Did not see us.
Did not see how we loved him,
How we waited, mute as shadows.

So tonight we'll go drink and talk it over in our new glib
way,
Not admitting we were taken in.
"Self-referential," we might say
Of the words, of the stack of books that no one reads much
anymore,
The big plans, rushed briefings, blaze of lights, frantic
press.
The proud figure framed on the screen
With meek Echo standing to the side. Echo.

For yes, there were the women, always the women,
Women to wait, to listen, to serve. Women to reflect,
To repeat. Women to receive. To relieve.
Oh yes, you know you were there
On your knees before him.

Old tales had called him "blessed by the gods,"
"A beautiful youth."

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But the gods could see that he could not see
Others.

Gods notice these things.

And being gods, they give curses as well as blessings.

As a boy he'd stand at his mother's dresser
And pull the sides of the three-way mirror close
To angle his image, the image repeating and repeating,
Rippling out to the vanishing point.
Then reflecting again in his own blue eyes.

Even then he knew it—we knew it—
That the beauty was there first.

It was there

Before the noise, before the crowds,

Before the boredom and betrayals.

I'll tell anyone who asks,

The beauty was there first.

Nemesis said of him, mostly in sorrow,
May he who loves not others love himself.

Love was his punishment. For love
He leaned over the waters,
Entranced,
To catch that last close glimpse.
Breath sounds drowned by the pouring rushing river,
He leaned so far
For love.
And he fell.
A tumbling form shrouded in the rising vapor,
Mind dissolved in stream.

Echo could do nothing.

At last, in the quiet pool,
In the calm he drifted, wet-dreaming his love,
Face staring up from the waters,
Eyes reflecting the blue skies,
Floating in the swell and fall
Of the dappled leaf and flower-filled water,
That dappled leaf and flower-filled water.

So he's gone, lost to our bright and vacant now.
Lost, with the harm he did, the pain he cost.
"A tragedy," they all noted. "Such promise..."
But now the TV talkers have moved on to new hurts.

Time to go home, to fold the old clippings
And file them away.

But wait.
Let's stay together here a moment longer
And reflect on who he was.
How we knew him
In all his certainty,
Still young and proud with promise,
The first flower of spring.