

# Echo

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I STARTED TO THINK specifically about Narcissus when I came across Christopher Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism*.<sup>1</sup> The book seemed such an attack on the few social gains made by feminism. Yet Narcissus was a boy! What seemed particularly unjust was the description of the young executive as "the happy hooker." (The word *Yuppie* had not yet come into the common language.) Prostitutes, however, were already organizing precisely because their class-position was rather different from that of young executives.<sup>2</sup> I turned to Freud and found that he too had located the richest examples of narcissism among women, especially women unfulfilled by the secondary narcissism of motherhood. Where was Echo, the woman in Narcissus's story? My essay is an attempt to "give woman" to Echo, to deconstruct her out of traditional *and* deconstructive representation and (non)representation, however imperfectly.

There is a curious moment, peculiarly susceptible to racist misuse, in Freud's "On Narcissism: An Introduction": "We have learned that libidinal instinctual inferences undergo the vicissitudes of pathogenic repression if they come into conflict with the subject's cultural and ethical ideas. . . . What he projects before him as his ideal is the *Ersatz* of the lost narcissism of his childhood, in which he was his own ideal. . . . The ego ideal . . . has a social side; it is also the common ideal of a family, a class or a nation."<sup>3</sup> It is certainly at least implied here that the felicitous emergence of the superego happens because there is something other than mere conflict between cultural and ethical ideas and the libidinal instinctual inferences.

The full-blown version of this particular theme—of non-European cultures being stuck in varieties of narcissism and its vicissitudes—is not uncommon. Asia and Africa are always supposed to have had trouble with Oedipus. (Very broadly and irreverently speaking, if—as a man—you can't get to Oedipus, you are stuck with Narcissus. Women can't pass through Oedipus, and therefore the secondary narcissism of attachment to the (boy)child saves them from themselves, from penis-envy and so forth.) Their growth is arrested on

the civilizational scale. Hegel trumped Freud in this in his plotting of the itinerary of the Spirit in Art.<sup>4</sup> In the case of India, which in a certain way I “know” best, Sudhir Kakar, the eminent psychoanalyst, has diagnosed the Indian male type to be arrested in the moment of Narcissus.<sup>5</sup> V. S. Naipaul, a diasporic Indian visiting India for the first time in 1962, fell on this diagnosis with a vengeance. Although he has put down his earlier overreaction against India to his own ancestral Indo-Caribbean past in his new book, this particular definitive view seems unchanged; “underdeveloped ego” in the first book, infantile golden-ageism in the second. These are the two moments: Narcissus and the ego ideal.<sup>6</sup> Thus you might say that I am interested in the psychoanalytic Narcissus because, in a kind of “colonial” reconstellation of the matter of “Greece,” he is made to stand at the door of the free discourse of Oedipus.

I have always felt uneasy about the use of psychoanalysis in cultural critique since it is so culture-specific in its provenance. Like many others, I too have felt that Marxism, focusing on something on a much higher level of abstraction than the machinery, production, and performance of the mental theater, and as obviously global as capitalism, is not open to this particular charge. (To say capitalism is all over the place is not as universalist as to say everyone has the same-pattern psyche.) Although I feel the weight of Derrida’s critique of institutional psychoanalysis in the world, especially in such deeply ambivalent questions as psychiatric care for the Union Carbide victims in Bhopal, since I am not qualified to speak of psychoanalysis as clinical practice, I must leave it largely alone.<sup>7</sup>

For the use of feminist psychoanalysis in understanding sexual difference and gendering I feel some sympathy because it is so actively contestatory. But general cultural critique has always seemed to me to be quite another matter. Without the risks or responsibilities of transference, at least implicitly diagnostic and taxonomic, ignoring geopolitical and historical detail in the interest of making group behavior intelligible, and not accountable to any method of verification, the brilliance of psychoanalytic cultural criticism has always left me a bit suspicious.

Yet Freud has remained one of my flawed heroes, an intimate enemy. To his race, class, and gender-specificity I would apply the words I wrote about Charlotte Bronte more than a decade ago: “If even minimally successful, my reading should incite a degree of rage against the gendered/imperialist narrativization of history, that it should produce so abject a script for him.”<sup>8</sup>

Both Freud and Marx move me in their engagement with ethics. Freud thought he had revised Kant, the representative ethical phi-

philosopher of the Enlightenment.<sup>9</sup> In spite of all Freud's claims, it is his vulnerability as a moral philosopher that is for me a lesson of history.

It was finally my contact with the ethical philosopher Bimal Krishna Matilal that allowed me to make room for Freud in my intellectual world. Professor Matilal argued that nineteenth-century Indologists were basically correct in estimating that India had no tradition of moral philosophy in the Western European sense.<sup>10</sup> But they had not been able to grasp either the Indic tradition of rational critique or the tradition of practical ethics in India. According to Matilal, the latter was based on the reading of narrative instantiations of ethical problems. We read some of the *Mahabharata* together in this way. I realized that this way of doing rather than exclusively talking about doing (the other is also an ethical decision, of course—this is at the root of my unease with the use of psychoanalysis in cultural critique) ethics was a rather widespread, rather global, phenomenon, not confined to non-European cultures. It had been ranked as “popular” by most high-cultural European-model moral philosophical systems. (I am not speaking, of course, of diagnosing story lines as formal allegories, drawing morals from parables, or attention to the “moral dimension” of fiction.) Jon Elster's *Ulysses and the Sirens*, which I was reading at the time, seemed an example of moral philosophizing on that “popular” model.<sup>11</sup> And psychoanalysis, as a challenge to systematic moral philosophy, had certainly read received narratives and the sequentially constructed narratives of analysts as instantiations of socioethical problems. As a cultural critic rather than a clinical practitioner, I was not obliged to take the conclusions as scientific system. As a being in ethics, I could share them as malleable situational lessons.

Professor Matilal also suggested that the moral dilemma was the most important terrain for the exercise of this type of practical ethics as encountered in the Indic tradition. Freud's recognition of the aporia between terminable and interminable analyses, and Derrida's thinking of ethics as the experience of the impossible, resonated with this suggestion.<sup>12</sup> Derrida's work is also a critique of traditional European systematic moral philosophy, after all. Further, this particular privileging of the aporia in the field of ethical decision seemed quite apposite to the tale of Narcissus. As I will attempt to show in my reading of Ovid, it is a tale of the aporia between self-knowledge and knowledge for others.

In this matter of knowledge for others I also received an impetus of interest from my discussions with Bimal Matilal. He discussed an argument advanced by Gangeṣa, a twelfth-century linguist, that

the production of truth was not necessarily dependent upon the speaker's intention. (This is *bhrāntapratāarakavākya*, the case of the deluded deceiver, who speaks the truth while thinking to lie.)<sup>13</sup> I felt that Ovid himself, against his probable intentions, had monumentalized in neglected Echo the random possibility of the emergence of an occasional truth of a kind.<sup>14</sup>

Freud's "On Narcissism," written on the threshold of *The Metapsychological Papers*, is philosophically bold. The desire of psychoanalysis is to tap the illogic that produces the subject's logic, and also the logic of the subject's illogic. Thus at the opening of the essay, Freud quietly asserts that at the origin "of the hypothesis of separate ego- and sexual-drives" (N 79) there is no grounding unity but only a riddle, the grounding riddle or *Grundrätzel* of biology. Unlike the Sphinx's riddling question to Oedipus, which for Hegel signifies the turn to Europe, "it is as idle to dispute" this absence of ground "as to affirm it" (N 79).<sup>15</sup> The theory of the separation of the ego and sexual drives, as necessary to psychoanalysis as is the separation of Mind and Knowledge to Hegel, arises simply out of the fact that "it is a necessary hypothesis that a unity comparable to the ego cannot be available [*vorhanden*] to the individual from the start" (N 76–77). This acknowledgement of risk, the revelation of the ground of the cure as a necessary methodological presupposition, is the Freud of the dilemma who resonates with all my predilections for the dilemma as the type case of the ethical situation, that I have outlined in the opening pages of this essay. (If there is an objection to seeing the analyst's behavior as a species of ethical behavior—doing the right thing for the other person in light of the best knowledge available—then this resonance will fail.) How then does he interrupt the risk with the claim to science? "I am of the opinion that that is just the difference between a speculative theory and a science built upon the interpretation of the empirical. The latter will not envy speculation its privilege of having a smooth, logically unassailable foundation [*Fundamentierung*] . . . . The fundament [*Fundament*] of science . . . is observation alone" (N 77).

It is a nice reversal of received ideas: speculation is logically firm; science is logically ungrounded but has an observational foundation. It will not surprise us that the science is anthropology and the observation fieldwork: speculation about "the mental life of primitive peoples," which then allows him to draw conclusions about "the mental life of children," although in the sentence describing the nature of these observations he conflates the two groups of people, as though primitive peoples were childless (N 75). In fact, if the

analogy between primitive peoples and children were not scientific, the fundament of the science would be blown away. I am obliged to notice that the ground of the differentiation between the speculative and the scientific is becoming rather shaky here as well. We are told not to try to grapple with the grounding biological riddle of sexual difference as providing a basis for a theory arguing the ego's initial separation from sexual drives because it would be as ridiculous as attempting to prove inheritance by arguing from the kinship of all races. Does not the childlike behavior of primitive peoples belong to the same order of argument? In fact, is it not, in a certain way, exactly the opposite of arguments about the universal kinship of races? If the other term of the analogy brings the activities of the analyst practicing terminable analysis into the same workaday register as the settlement of legal disputes, then the entire justification of the scientificity of the diagnosis of narcissism is dubious.

What does Freud observe, when he tells us that "this extension of the libido theory receives reinforcement from our observations and views [speculations?] on the mental life of children and primitive peoples" (N 75)? "In the latter," he continues, "we find characteristics which, if they occurred singly, might be put down to megalomania. In the children of today, whose development is much more opaque [*undurchsichtbar*] to us . . ." (N 75) Why are the characteristics of remote primitive peoples transparent to "us"? So that they can offer a basis for the firm foundation of science? And why do "we *expect* to find an exactly analogous attitude" (N 75) in the children of today? Is this not the same sort of desire for a methodological certainty which had been sternly put in its place earlier? Once the analogy is "found," or rather the declaration of its expectation is offered as its finding, the primitive peoples are not heard of again.

I am of course not complaining that Freud is not sufficiently scientific. I have already said that it is the Freud who acknowledges dilemmas with whom I am in sympathy. I am remarking that the scientific basis that Freud needs is deeply marked by a rather offensive sort of casual racism for which there is certainly no precedent in the authoritative staging of the Narcissus narrative in Ovid. Freud was a man of considerable classical education and a sensitive reader. One might even invent a curious connection between Ovid's stated project in the *Metamorphoses* and Freud's stated project in the narcissism essays. Freud: I am "replacing the special chemical substances [of the organic soil (*Boden*) of the psyche] by special psychical forces" (N 78). And Ovid's *Metamorphoses* begins: "My mind is bent to tell of bodies changed into new forms."<sup>16</sup>

Yet Freud leaves Ovid alone. In fact, Ovid's Narcissus, at first sight, seems to suffer from Freud's version of secondary narcissism. In one Freudian articulation at least, primary narcissism is an "absolute self-sufficien[cy] from which we step, toward noticing a changeful world outside and the beginnings of finding objects, by being born [*mit dem Geborenwerden*]."17 Here the mother is nothing but, in Luce Irigaray's word, an "envelope."18 By contrast, in Ovid Liriopes's womb has a history. It comes to envelop Narcissus by a primary rape by Cephisus, demidivine violence as sexual violence that does not offend the political economy of the gods. The entire pretext of Tiresias and Echo as major players is crosshatched by a story of punishment and reward. When Freud and Lacan use the narratives as psychoethical instantiations they ignore this framing.

(It may be argued that Lacan dispenses with the story lines of Oedipus and Narcissus.19 But Lacan is not a monolithic proper name. I cannot now spend time on the various turns in Lacan's career, nor on the connection between proper names and the psychoanalytic institution. Here suffice it to say that the idea of the Mirror Stage, Lacan's reinscription of Narcissus, was launched in 1936. And in the 1949 version Oedipus is present without qualification; and the end of psychoanalysis is a rewriting of Narcissus's *iste ego sum* (I am that) into an ec-static "*Thou art that*." For Lacan, it is in this that "is revealed to [the patient] the cipher of his mortal destiny."20 I will argue that it is Ovid's Narcissus who is an icon of mortiferous self-knowledge.)

Lacan's mirror-stage analysis assumes his "specular image" jubilantly, thus "exhibit[ing] in an exemplary situation"—exactly as narratives instantiate active ethical structures—the "primordial form . . . [that] situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone."21 Freud's secondary Narcissus is unenlightened.

How different this modern Narcissus—plotted (in both the early Lacan and Christopher Lasch) in terms of a rather banal contrast between group ("social") and individual ("fictional") or, in an admittedly subtler form in Freud, of an irreducible secondariness which alone gives a clue to the primary fiction, again a methodological underived fiction—from Ovid's Narcissus, emerging from a scene of responsibility and punishment.22

As Freud and Lacan use an approximation of the Narcissus narrative for ethical instantiation, they ignore its framing. Indeed, as I look into the mass of learned literature on both the Narcissus tradition and narcissism, not only do I notice a singular absence of *independent* attention to the *narrativization* of Echo (the Renaissance

practice of Echolalia has rather little to do with the rhetorical philosopheme called Echo), but also an ignoring of the frame.<sup>23</sup> I myself, although attentive to the frame, had not noticed Echo's part in it ten years ago. Here is what I wrote:

The Narcissus story in Ovid is introduced by other accounts of sexual difference and divine violence. It unfolds while on earth a child torn from its mother's womb—because the mortal Semele could not withstand her lover Jove's heavenly glory, a sight she craved by Juno's vengeful temptation—gestates in the Father's thigh, God appropriating woman's power. In the preamble of the Narcissus story as such stands Tiresias. He too names a site where sexual difference is suspended. To become woman was his initial punishment for disturbing the copulation of holy serpents. Retaining the memory of maleness he had realized that being-woman was a punishment. He had repeated his offense deliberately—an act of self-knowledge which will find its parallel in Narcissus—and won back maleness: a transformation-punishment that is thus also the fulfillment of his desire. Now he retains the memory of having-been-woman. He gives the opinion that women have greater sexual pleasure, an opinion contradicted by Narcissus' fulfillment and Echo's perpetual lack that we encounter in the embedded story. Juno punishes him with blindness, Jupiter compensates with clairvoyance.<sup>24</sup>

Ten years later, Echo's figuration became clear. She too had served Jupiter. As he played with nymphs, she would engage Juno in prudent chat. It is this beguiling prudence that Juno takes from her: you can no longer speak for yourself. Talkative girl, you can only give back, you are the respondent as such. Jupiter does not give her anything in return.

It is within this asymmetrical frame of transgression, punishment, and dubious reward that the Narcissus story is framed. The story of Narcissus is a tale of the construction of the self as object of knowledge. I will suggest below that the account of Echo is a story of a punishment that is finally a dubious reward quite outside of the borders of the self.

The story of Narcissus is framed, then, in the value-coding or gendering of affect in a spectacular dynamics of transgression and reward. For Narcissus himself, we remember Tiresias's famous line: He will live as long as he does not know himself. He can instantiate, in the kind of reading I am proposing, the construction of the self as an object of knowledge. (It is perhaps in the recognition of this mortiferous autoerotic model of self-knowledge that Rousseau made *Narcisse* the artist.)

There is a moment of exquisite anguish before the boy can describe

his predicament: *et placet, et video; sed quod videoque placetque, / non tamen invenio* (*M* 154, ll. 446–47) (It pleases, and I see it; but I cannot reach what I see and what pleases). In his description, it is clearly knowledge of the division in identity that kills and inscribes him in nature. He points and declares, *iste ego sum*: “I am that. . . . I now know my image. . . . I have what I desire. Strange prayer for a lover, I would that what I love were absent. . . . Death is not serious for me for in death I will leave my sorrow” (*M* 156, ll. 463–71).

It should be noticed that *sum* in Narcissus’s declaration is grammatically precarious in this declaration, yet possible. When Freud topologizes the psyche, it is the impossibility of self-knowledge as such that is captured in *wo Es war soll Ich werden* (where it was, I shall become). Narcissus’s formula might run: *Wo Es ist, bin Ich (nicht)* (where it is, I am [not]); the limit of the possibility of self-knowledge. In Freud’s ethical reading of narratives however, this relationship cannot be established. Freud’s reading is no different from the magisterial Christian reading of *Paradise Lost*.<sup>25</sup> And therefore we remain accustomed to interpreting the declaration of the Ovidian Narcissus as a psychic problem. Attending to the frame and the text, I am obliged to say: if this is pathogenic repression what is on the other side is family romance. And Ovid’s Narcissus, unlike Freud’s, is not incapable of wishing for his own death.

Insofar as I am culturally banished from Oedipus, I relate the narcissian proposition to another type of ethical instantiation in a narrative moment. Here is the utterance of Mary Oraon, in “The Hunt” by Mahasweta Devi.<sup>26</sup> Mary is the girl-child of rape, of an Indian tribal by a colonial Englishman; as Narcissus is the boy-child of divine rape. Mary is the emblem of the subaltern postcolonial. “My mother should have killed me when I was born,” says she. “And then, what about you?” asks another. “I would not have been,” she answers.

This is the moment of Narcissus: If I make disappear what I cannot not desire, I disappear too. But this is only one end of the shuttle. We move now to Echo.

Echo in Ovid is staged as the instrument of the possibility of a truth not dependent upon intention, a reward uncoupled from, indeed set free from, the recipient. Throughout the reported exchange between Narcissus and Echo, she behaves according to her punishment and gives back the end of each statement. Ovid “quotes” her, except when Narcissus asks, *Quid . . . me fugis* (Why do you fly from me [*M* 150, ll. 383–84])? Caught in the discrepancy between second person interrogative (*fugis*) and the imperative (*fugi*), Ovid



cannot allow her to *be*, even Echo, so that Narcissus, flying from her, could have made of the ethical structure of response a fulfilled antiphone. He reports her speech in the name of Narcissus: *quot dixit, verba recepit* (*M* 150, l. 384)—he receives back the words he says. The discrepancy is effaced in the discrepancy of translation. In English, Echo could have echoed “Fly from me” and remained echo.<sup>27</sup>

Narcissus is punished with the knowledge of the relationship between death and self-knowledge because he had not responded to the desire of others. But this punishment is not in the name of Echo. Here too Echo, by definition dependent, remains uncoupled from the effect of herself as cause. It is another youth of indeterminate sex who brings Nemesis down upon Narcissus. You scorn us, know yourself. Child of rape, know as your Mother knows—for Tiresias’s answer about the consequences of Narcissus’s self-knowledge had been given to Liriope—you disappear if you act on your knowledge.

Echo is dead in the narrative before this happens. And in her brief exchange with Narcissus, she marks the withheld possibility of a truth outside intention.

Is there a radical counterfactual future anterior, where Echo, against her intention, a poor thing at best, will forever have exercised the negative transference (“fly from me” between question and order) that will have short-circuited the punishment of mortiferous self-knowledge? Is that the impossible experience of identity as wound? The *a-venir* of a history not written? But this can only be the radical interruption of ethical hope, which must be cut down to logical size so a calculus can be proposed. Let us look at Echo’s death.

In an interruption of narrative time, Echo comes to echo farewell, to echo the rites of mourning.

At the moment of Narcissus’s death, his sisters come to mourn him and in the place of the body find the flower. The body seems to have been inscribed into nature by sheer force of the agon of self-knowledge. The flower nods at the water here on earth to be the *a-letheia* (truth as unforgetting) of the limits of self-knowledge as Narcissus still gazes upon the waters of Lethe—though, unlike the Loeb translation, Ovid does not mention the image: *in Stygia spectabat aqua* (*M* 158, l. 505, translated in the Loeb edition as “he kept on gazing on his image in the Stygian pool”).<sup>28</sup>

By contrast, Echo’s echoing farewell comes from a space already insufficiently inscribed—an insufficiency that is the name not of the limits of self-knowledge but of the possibility of deconstruction. The rest of my essay will elaborate this theme.

At first there is nothing but voice and desiccated body. Finally there is nothing but voice, “for they say that her bones were turned to stone.” Ovid uses a peculiar formulation: *vox manet* (*M* 152, l. 399). Received wisdom has it that it is *scripta* that *manent*. It is writing that remains. But in this singular space, voice remains, the body become stone. “The structural possibility of being severed from its referent or signified (and therefore from communication and its content) seems to me to make of every mark, even if oral, a grapheme in general, . . . the nonpresent *remaining* of a differential mark cut off from its alleged ‘production’ or origin.”<sup>29</sup>

Let us now consider this figuring of Echo in two related but different ways. First, how does it give us the offer of a precarious foothold outside of the subject-position of the “wild” psychoanalyst cultural critic, producing an irresponsible simulacrum of the analyst in her consulting-room?

Just as Oedipus *has to be* male, Echo has to be female. (Narcissus as figured can go both ways and, as we have seen, in the banalized psychic-problematic interpretation, has been most often located in the female.) Echo is female-figured because the asymmetry of the reward-punishment compensation circuit between herself and Tiresias is equalized, still asymmetrically, from the moment of the impossibility of echoing as punishment between the Latin interrogative and imperative forms of “fly from me,” the two subject-positions named Narcissus and Echo in the exchange, where someone called Ovid (the analysand? the cultural critic? the received storyteller as writer? us?) has to take a role and fill in with “what happened” which is never exactly “what happened” marked with a difference, here the difference between question and response, questioner and respondent. Guarding this difference is Echo’s punishment turned into reward, a deconstructive lever for future users. We remember that even if Echo had been able to echo and act according to mere punishment with no difference of subject-position, the response would have been a refusal to answer or (we cannot be sure) a suggestion that this particular respondent is inappropriate. Thus: *N.* Why do you fly from me? *E.* Fly from me—I cannot answer you or I am not your proper respondent: a deferment independent of, indeed the opposite of, the sender’s intention. A difference and a deferment together are, strictly speaking—but can one be strict about this?—*différance*.

Here is the figuration of Echo’s “reward.” Her punishment fails (in order) to mark *différance*. Ovid covers it over with telling; we open it.<sup>30</sup>

It is this mode of utterance that is covered over in Ovid’s report

that Echo says “fly from me [?].” In the rest of the narrative, through the representation of a stable-yet-unstable, same-yet-different non-originary voice that remains, an unintentional vehicle of a possible cure—the figured though separated accompaniment of a successful mortiferous self-knowledge that cannot advance—is glimpsed, a cure that is one possible case among many.

For Echo is obliged to echo everyone who speaks. Her desire and performance are dispersed into absolute chance rather than an obstinate choice, as in the case of Narcissus. If the ever-renewed narcissus flower is a “natural monument” to the fulfillment of Narcissus’s desire-as-punishment out of this world, the lithography of Echo’s bony remains merely points to the risk of response. It has no identity proper to itself. It is obliged to be imperfectly and interceptively responsive to another’s desire, if only for the self-separation of speech. It is the catachresis of response as such.

Echo’s mourning is outside the opposition of mourning and a melancholia only half of which is narcissism. She is inscribed as *destinerrance* as such. She gives the lie even to Derrida’s absent interlocutrice, whom Derrida echoes and corrects (reaching for Narcissus and Ovid in one) in *The Post Card*: “P.S. I forgot, you are quite right: one of the paradoxes of destination, is that if you wanted to *demonstrate*, expressly for someone, that something never arrives at its destination, it’s no use. The demonstration, once it has reached its end, will have proved what one should not demonstrate. But this is why, dear friend, I always say ‘a letter *can* always *not* arrive at its destination, etc.’”<sup>31</sup>

In my ethically instantiated reading of the Ovidian narrative, the traces of Echo occupy the position of something like an analyst. Under the broken rebus—legendary bones and paradoxically persistent absent voice, connected by nothing at all—that is her mark or guarantee that she will be around, the mastership of truth (Derrida’s critique of the Lacanian analyst), is the experience of the impossible (Derrida’s description of ethics).<sup>32</sup> Echo will not have been dragged into the circuit of political imitations.

And now the second question: What ethical instantiation does this figuration of Echo offer “us”—the worldwide collectivity of conscientized feminists of color from bourgeois origins or in passive capitalist social relations? We must catch the undoing moment of Echo as she attends, at a distance, every act of cultural narcissism.

This feminist is *culturally* divided from the women at the bottom. I have already indicated that what she sees as *her* face she knows to be an “it” which she loves and of which she desires the disap-

pearance, which is the precarious moment of the Ovidian Narcissus; in order not to speak for, speak to, listen to, but respond to the subaltern sister. In the current conjuncture, national identity debates in the South and “liberal” multiculturalism in the North want her to engage in restricted-definition narcissism as well. Simply put: love-your-own-face, love-your-own-culture, remain-fixated-in-cultural-difference, simulate what is really pathogenic repression in the form of questioning the European universalist superego.

If this position can raise a “why do you fly from me?” toward the subaltern separated from the feminist, then the feminist might, just might, ventriloquize the “fly from me” toward that Narcissus-face, both the self-knowing Ovidian and the deluded Freudian. In fact, the subaltern herself is also sometimes caught in the desire for Narcissus and the “fly from me” gesture, on another level. Once there is an effort to engage in the politics of subalternity-on-the-move, who questions and who answers “fly from me” is not at all clear. The only thing we know is that “be like me, be my image” can never be on the agenda, from either side. I should also emphasize that this “imitation” cannot be the slow-motion thinking-through of a raised consciousness. In the field of decisions, it can only be the sort of much-practiced reflex that shows the steps in slow motion if anyone cares to analyze after the fact; and analysis, notoriously, is inadequate to its object. If, under such circumstances, the imitation of Echo takes us this far, we have to remember that Echo produces the possibility of a cure against the grain of her intention, and finally uncoupled from intention. Echo will not have been dragged into the circuit of adequate political imitation. The “practice of freedom,” especially in the context of women divided into feminists and women, does not come simply because of the fact of gaining something called independence.

In the context of the difference between Isma (colloquial Arabic for “she is called,” with the proper name to be filled in, and thus, in this case, a blank), central character in *Fantasia*, a self-knowing woman (and therefore mortiferously aware of the limits of self-knowledge, caught in the moment of the Ovidian Narcissus) who has learned the practice of the writing of the hegemonic language and women in her so-called traditional culture, Assia Djébar has written something called “*a-phonie*,” which I discuss below.<sup>33</sup>

As an Algerian woman who has learned the practice of French writing, Assis Djébar is not-quite-not-Narcissus, with some doubt about claiming the historicophilosophical “I,” for traditional women of her class will insist that she insert her “self” into a received orality—strictly speaking, a graph (“the stitched seam of arche-

writing, condition of the [so-called oral] language, and of writing in the narrow sense”<sup>34</sup>—as the only appropriate mode of expression for her, her “law of genre”<sup>35</sup>:

Each gathering, weekly or monthly, carries over the web [*tissu*] of an impossible revolt. Each speaker [*parleuse*]*—*the one who clamors too high or the one who whispers too fast*—*is freed. The “I” of the first person will never be used: in stereotyped formulas the voice has deposited its burden of rancor and of rales rasping the throat. Each woman, flayed inside, is eased in the collective listening. And the same for gaiety, or happiness*—*which you must guess at; litotes, proverb, to the point of riddles or transmitted stories, all the verbal stagings are unrolled for unpicking fate, or exorcizing it, but never to strip it bare. (*F* 154–55)

Over and against this chain of mere whispered *souvenir* that survives in the acknowledgement of the exclusion from the writing of classical Arabic she moves to French for a narrative *mémoire*. Yet she cannot be the Rousseauistic *Narcisse* of French tradition either. She must make the other acknowledgement as well: that the French dictionary cannot grasp the rhetoric of the Algerian woman’s body. The fragmentary finale of *Fantasia* begins with two French dictionary entries that read a figure in that corporeal tropology in two opposed ways. One: *tzarl-rit* means “to utter cries of joy while smacking the lips (of women).”<sup>36</sup> The other: *tzarl-rit* means to “shout, vociferate (of women when some *misfortune* befalls them).”<sup>37</sup> Mourning or jubilation, Narcissus cannot know.

Caught in this middle space, all she can insert, ambiguously, is a sheltering *a-phonie*, a concept-metaphor for which I find no literal referent: “All words, too lit-up, become braggadoccio, and *aphonie*, untamed [*inentamé*—the history of the language will allow unbroached] resistance” (*F* 178).

*A-phonie*, midway between women’s oral culture and patriarchal scripture, is a willed imitation of Echo’s warning-in-longing that must continue to fail, since one cannot Echo willingly. It is the impossibility in view of which the risk of legal battles like the fight for a uniform civil law must be undertaken. And if this is interpreted in terms of the mirror-stage narcissism of Enlightenment phallocracy, *vox manet*.<sup>38</sup>

If I read the deconstructive embrace between Isma and Echo as an ethical instantiation, here then is what emerges: something relating to the need of a uniform civil code for men and women, not personal codes that keep women minors; something that would make it impossible for patterns of transgression and reward to be

asymmetrically gendered, in the calculus of the law.

Negotiating without much choice with various structures inherited from colonialism, necessarily fighting to write the body in the normative, privative, rational abstractions of a uniform civil law, rather than a culturally inherited and imperially consolidated personal code, the body “bereft of voice,” is a stone (*F* 156). In this divided field, the recovery of a woman’s voice is useless in autobiography and equally anthropologicistic if it does not acknowledge that the woman-in-culture may be the site of internalized phallogracy. It is thus that, between writing in French and the culturally patriarchal woman’s voice, Djébar gives to the supercolonized woman the task of *a-phonie*: not a writing, not a graph, but not the phonocentric responsibility-rather-than-rights-based patriarchal-functionalist unmediated woman’s voice either. This may claim “identity” with the impossible dimension of the rhetoricity of Ovid’s Echo: *vox manet*.

In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” I wrote of Freud as a monitory model.<sup>39</sup> In this essay as well, as I read narrative as guide to action and limits to action, Freud remains an ally, as class, race, and gender-bound, in his different ways, as no doubt am I. Assia Djébar’s brilliant essay on the gaze in Delacroix can be included in this alliance.<sup>40</sup> The deconstructive embrace that holds the elite texts reporting on the nineteenth-century subaltern and the subalternist historians is another example. The elite allies can serve as monitory models for the decolonizing feminist, but they—Ovid, Freud, Delacroix, colonial elite—lose their lineaments in the process. They cannot serve when we try to learn—outside of the closed circuit of the production of academic knowledge—the impossible response to the gendered subaltern. In her own separate enclosure, the subaltern still cannot speak as the subject of a speech act. Dishing out our personal pain in academic bestsellers serves women on the make or catharsizing voyeurs. And Rigoberta Menchu, a spirited subaltern who has networked herself into the structure of hegemonic discourse, immediately becomes the object of right-wing critique.

What follows is an extended appendix. Readings such as the above are read, if at all, with a certain “political piety,” as a “third-world intervention” and then laid aside when the serious mainstream work of deconstruction is undertaken. I have therefore included the following three examples:

I am in a deconstructive embrace with Claire Nouvet’s “An Impossible Response,” which I read after completing the preceding pages.<sup>41</sup> It is a brilliant and much more adroit example of the same

genre of reading. Our embrace is asymmetrical, as are all embraces. The asymmetry can be tabulated as a difference in stakes, which cannot not be reckoned (with) in ethical-instantiation readings. Her stake seems to be the figurality of the self. What my stake is the reader will decide. Within the warmth of an embrace, then, I reckon our asymmetry:

In spite of her careful reading of Echo, Narcissus remains the hero of the predicament of the “self.” He it is who, character or figure, with the help of Echo, figure or character, thematizes or figurates the impossibility signaled in Nouvet’s title.

In place of the “self,” the Ovidian text, deconstructing itself, is invested with a certain sovereignty. Much of this sovereignty is established by allowing it to perform an undermining of “character” by “figure.”<sup>42</sup> I see this as a contemporary fading-away of the “polytheist” habit of mind of thinking being and principle in an agile slippage.<sup>43</sup> One focus does not necessarily “undermine” or “correct” the other (although that power-claim is the substance of “polytheisms” as sites of conflict) in a “live polytheist” discourse. Who knows how a “Roman” thought a “Greek” story? I am not interested in a vulgar Heideggerian narrative of religion-in-ethics. But it does not seem necessary to censor the genealogical imagination either.

Perhaps it is this imperative to keep Narcissus center stage that does not allow Nouvet to notice Echo as also in an anterior and asymmetrical frame of punishment and reward with Tiresias. Therefore she must inscribe Ovid’s inability to let Echo be Echo as Narcissus unechoed (IR 121). Indeed, if the failure of echo between interrogative and imperative is finessed by Ovid in reported speech, Nouvet’s text, replete with quotations, gives this “passage” (in every sense) as three pages of report.

This stake in the “drama and story” of the “self” seems to limit the question of the feminine. Since the unbalanced parallel of Tiresias and Echo as male and female singularities is not seen, at a certain point in Nouvet’s essay, Echo is simply seen as “the feminine” rather than “*bad* girl,” “talkative girl,” “girl of deluding tongue,” as in Ovid. In a few pages of her essay, the “self” becomes genderless, until the resounding first person plural at the end of the essay operates simply in terms of being-human:

Ovid’s text opens a dangerous question: if a humanist self-assertion is “criminal” [I should have trouble here because of the failure of the polytheist imagination, the confusion of self-recognition and self-knowledge (of this more later), and the meaning of “punishment”], can *we* ever hope to avoid

this crime? . . . . It is by definition “incomprehensible” since it revokes the very notion of a self. We therefore cannot pretend to comprehend it, but can only expose *our* “selves” to its questioning, a questioning which can only disturb the comfort of *our* “good conscience” by confronting us to the uncertain status of *our* “subjectivity,” of *our* “selfhood,” and even of our “humanity.” (IR 133–34; emphases mine)

Ethics are not a problem of knowledge but a call of relationship (without relationship, as limit case). But the problem and the call are in a deconstructive embrace: Narcissus and Echo. If we see ourselves only as subjects (or “selves”) of a knowledge that cannot relate and see the “self” as writing, our unavoidable ethical decisions will be caught in the more empirical, less philosophical “night of non-knowledge,”<sup>44</sup> a “decenter[ing] of the subject, as is easily said, without challenging anew the bond between, on the one hand, responsibility, and, on the other, freedom of subjective consciousness or purity of intentionality. . . . a parade of irresponsibilizing destruction, whose surest effect would be to leave everything as it is,” and to flatten gender.<sup>45</sup>

If we move to Echo as the (un)intending subject of ethics, we are allowed to understand the mysterious responsibility of ethics, that its subject cannot not comprehend.<sup>46</sup> In fact, if in the curious protocol of a deconstructive embrace I transgress Nouvet’s text by displacing the antecedent of “it” from “Ovid’s text” to “Echo,” the move is made. Yet this is not simply to make Echo say *I* am it now (*nunc sum ego iste*), for we are levering her out where Ovid’s text signals its loss of sovereignty, that it cannot catch her as such, make her act Echo.

Because she is obliged to give to Ovid’s text this self-deconstructive sovereignty, Nouvet describes the Narcissus split as self-recognition rather than self-knowledge.<sup>47</sup> It is, of course, not a question of right or wrong readings. Between different ethical-instantiation fields, the difference may be no more than between seeing the glass half-full rather than half-empty. For Nouvet the self-recognition is inscribed in negatively charged language, as a “problem” and a “decomposition” (IR 124, 125). For us, Narcissus’s self-knowledge is an accession to a clarity that is so clear that it will not lead to relation: to know that to know the self is to slip into visible silence: some call it *writing*. If Ovid and Freud are other readers/writers of a narrateme in a tradition of ethical performance, then “Ovid” (the reader function of the Narcissus story in *Metamorphoses*) is as much a text as his “text,” and deconstruction is as much an experience of the impossible as it is a response to the impossible as an impossible response.



My stake in Echo will not allow me to ignore Freud's ignoring of Ovid's staging of (Narcissus and) Echo. Freud is part of the precomprehended scenario of "An Impossible Response," emerging via Blanchot's invocation of the primal scene as scene of writing.<sup>48</sup> An in-house reading, where the text is sovereign in its self-deconstruction, even as the "self" becomes (dis)figured.

It is perhaps this that makes for the peculiar blind spot of the essay: the reading of Narcissus's death as a liquefaction (IR 125–28). It is indeed an "ambiguous" death, not because it is a liquefaction, but because it is a burning as well as a liquefaction. The two vehicles of the similes that describe Narcissus's demise are "yellow wax" and "hoar frost." How render both, as does Nouvet, to "water"? It is only if we remember the yellow flower and Narcissus in Styx that we can "understand" Echo as still "around." "Is there anyone around?" is not, strictly speaking, a question whose "response . . . inhabits the question" (IR 110). Its answer may inhabit the question, when Echo answers, by default. *Vox manet*, but only sometimes as resident answers.

Under the rebus of Echo then—since we are nowhere without a blind spot—I invite Nouvet to share mine. Rather than overlook the play of burning and melting, I "naturalize" *in-fans* (speech-less) into more than a pun with infancy, into a (historically and specifically) feminine infancy of speech (as ambiguous as liquefying through burning) that can no longer be written when self-knowledge inhabits the ambiguity of a "live autopsy," a contemporary *rearticulation* of Narcissus's desire for the death of the loved object: *un parler d'enfance qui ne s'écrit plus* (a speaking of infancy which can no longer be written), in an impossible response to which Djébar proposes *a-phonie*, not Narcissus's disaster but Echo's peculiar "reward": to "fail" to order flight from fixation with, in this case, a self that cannot accede to an "I," to an *ego sum*, to the *iste ego sum* of writing, which would itself have been unable to ask for that failed response except through the failure of self-knowledge, imagining that the shadow flies the shadower. I ask Claire Nouvet to attend to *a-phonie*, Echo's responsibility. This would allow her to escape the tedium of the Oedipal chain (here represented by Blanchot-Schlegel, one might have included Rousseau) reading Narcissus. Insert Echo as the unwitting force field that teaches us "that the imperative quality of 'il faut' proceeds in fact from a relentless and *demanding* uncertainty" (IR 131–32). Echo the brothers in a self-knowledge that "kills."

One question remains: Can this narrative be read without the specific ethical burden of the feminist in decolonization? By definition, ethical-instantiation readings must have different stakes, different experiences of impossibility. I have already referred to Freud's mature reflection upon the impossibility of an adequately justified psychoanalysis. Keeping that *aporia* in view, I offer here the outlines of a reading from "a general psychoanalytic position," as if, beset by schools and subschools as the "science" is, such a thing were possible. I have chosen André Green's *Narcissisme de vie, narcissisme de mort* (Narcissism of Life, Narcissism of Death) simply because it is neither too conservative nor too current, innovative in one or two details without being aggressively original, and not yet in touch with feminism.<sup>49</sup>

Green remains within the invariable telos: Narcissus marks an arrest where there should be a passageway to others or the Other. Given his stake in the telos within the forgotten ethical impossibility of psychoanalysis, I will show how his text too asks for supplementation by Echo.

First, of course, Narcissus. Green has an intuition of the part of mortiferous self-knowledge; the part he calls "epistemophilia . . . implying the erotization of the process of thought" (*Nvnm* 33). Green's contribution in this text is the suggestion of a positive and a negative narcissism, and epistemophilia is the negative. But without Echo, the death generated by positive narcissism lacks the dignity of the Ovidian narrative: "for shame, the only way open is that of negative narcissism. A neutralization of affects is at work, a mortiferous enterprise where the work of a Sisyphus operates. I love no one. I love only myself. I love myself. I do not love. I no. I O. Same series for hatred. I hate no one. I hate only myself. I hate myself. I no. I O. This series of propositions illustrates the evolution towards the affirmation of the megalomaniac I as the last step before disappearance" (*Nvnm* 207).<sup>50</sup>

Yet Echo struggles to break through the argument. Here is the description of the psychic apparatus, admittedly the boldest Freudian breakthrough: "It is logical to admit that the effect of structuration [condition and effect of the apparatus] must come *from elsewhere* if the Self is thus engaged in the instantaneousness of the present" (*Nvnm* 93; emphasis mine). Narcissus immobile, Echo from elsewhere.

In an uncanny description of the project of psychoanalytic *thought*, Green writes, ostensibly about narcissism: "Narcissism is the effacement of the trace of the Other in the Desire of the One" (*Nvnm* 127). We see the effacement at work when, considering negative

narcissism in a woman, Green faithfully emphasizes her penultimate declaration, “*My mind is blank and I can’t think,*” but ignores her final remark: “Since I cannot work, I telephone someone” (*Nvnm* 157). “Tele-phone,” distant-voice, *vox manet*, an effort at domesticating Echo; but she will not yield to imitation, to the apparatus that would harness the distant voice to matching questions and answers.

“Echo” in lower case gives us a clue to her foreclosure. When Green proposes a complex of the dead mother, he says, in passing, “in fact, the complaint against X was really against a mother absorbed perhaps by something else, and unreachable without echo, but always sad” (*Nvnm* 235). Echo’s dispersal into the common language has not only foreclosed her narrative, but reversed and scrambled the narrative: an unreachable desired mother of the homosexual son.

Speaking of the treatment of moral narcissists, Green writes, “To the extent that it [transference] remains expressed by way of the words of the analyst in terms of objects, it has little echo on this material covered over by the narcissistic carapace” (*Nvnm* 201). Again, a longing for Echo, lost in the history of the language, not facing the terrifying ethical possibility that Echo/Transference might be as “absurd” as Narcissus/Self-representation (*Nvnm* 139).

Our reading proposes a shifting of the stakes. For us Narcissus is not necessarily a stalling of/in the self where there should be a passageway to others or the Other. There is access to the founding dilemma of ethics if we read the Narcissus-Echo *pair* as an icon (or, more accurately, a graph) of the passage, crossed easily and imperfectly in the exchange of everyday life, and authoritatively in the production of theory on all levels of civil and military enterprise. Then at “ground” level, where justification is sought and offered, we see the knowledge of the self as writing, stalled; and the symbolic circuit not as a relatively fixed Eurocentric scenario, but a contentless, enclitic, monstrative vector, its definitive responsive character unfilled with the *subject’s* intention, though the intentional moment (Echo’s speech toward Narcissus) is not absent.<sup>51</sup> Who can deny that, in the construction of the subject’s history, the driving force of the symbolic is a desire for self-knowledge, although full self-knowledge would mean an end to symbolicity? Why, in spite of so many hard lessons to the contrary—not the least from the vicissitudes of many cultural and gender-inscriptions—do we still cling to the rotarian epistemology of *advancing* from the Imaginary to the Symbolic?<sup>52</sup>

The plausibility of this reading is marked by Echo’s struggle for emergence in the text. She will be found in the text, even as she marked the moment of textual transgression in Ovid.

One re-forming entailed by this intervention is to make the self

“writing” and “male”—and to make the Symbolic “feminine.” Will this change a historical habit? I can hope.

I am in another sort of deconstructive embrace with my old graduate school friend Samuel Weber, both of us students of the predeconstructive Paul de Man, excited early by Derrida’s work, untroubled by changes in critical fashion, in our own different ways attempting to carve out political trajectories within what we know and learn. It is no surprise to me that in his *Legend of Freud*, Weber does not give sovereignty to the self-deconstructive “text” (here Freud) but produces a new reading from where it transgresses itself in terms of its own protocols.<sup>53</sup> In doing so, Weber produces a reading of psychoanalysis where narcissism is not a stage to be superseded, but rather plays a constitutive and operative role. I give below a summary of Weber’s remarkable rewriting of the Freudian enterprise, and end, again, by rescuing Echo, struggling to break through.

Weber sees “speculation,” reflection in the mirror or speculum, as itself narcissistic, and sees the project of the adequation of the self and of thought as an unwitting description of the narcissistic predicament. He provides a brilliant summary of scholarship in support of his contention that both French and Anglo-American Freudians “have shared the conviction that Freud articulated the death drive as an alternative, or even antidote, to the power exercised over his thought by the theory of narcissism” (*LF* 124). Although he is, I believe, somewhat unjust to Lacan here, he also suggests that in Freud, as opposed to what we find in Lacan, the scene is not one of progression *from* the Imaginary to the Symbolic, but “that there is an *other scene* of the Symbolic, of the Fort-Da game, and it is precisely: the Imaginary, in all of its aggressive, narcissistic ambivalence” (*LF* 97).<sup>54</sup> It is unjust to Ovid too, of course. The acknowledgement of the mortiferous quality of the self as writing is inscribed in Ovid’s narrativization; and Narcissus longs for death.

I resonate, nonetheless, with Weber when he suggests that Freud’s thought would develop according to the paradigm of a dynamic disunity of which narcissism is the organized, if ambiguous, part. “[W]hat is at stake here is the possibility of elaborating and rethinking what Deleuze has called the ‘transcendental’ nature of speculation in terms of a certain notion of narcissism, one that is never fully explicated in the writings of Freud, but which is all the more powerfully at work in his texts because it remains, in part at least, implicit. . . . The power of narcissism then, would entail not simply

the symptom of an individual subject, 'Freud': but rather the theoretical project of psychoanalysis itself, putting its limits into play" (LF 128, 125–26, 125).

"The power of narcissism." Where does it come from? The last words Echo gives back to Narcissus, to his *emoriar, quam sit tibi copia nostri* (M 150, l. 391)—translated in the Loeb edition as "May I die before I give you power o'er me!"—are *sit tibi copia nostri*! (I give you power over me). *Copia nostri* is "our plenty, our plenitude," but also "the provisions that we have laid up for the future," even "our forces," as in military forces, the same metaphor as in *Besetzung*, lost both in "cathexis" and *investissement*. Following the powerful tricks of Ovid's text, Narcissus's ambivalence toward death here—"May I die," nothing more than a rhetorical exclamation—is turned into truth independent of intention (explicit-implicit in Weber's text, *bhrāntapratāarakavākya* in Gangeṣa), even as Echo bequeathes her reserves to him by way of an "imperfect" repetition.<sup>55</sup>

Let us step out of the psychoanalytic enclosure for a moment here and repeat that, in terms of a feminism as such (whatever that might be), *sit tibi copia nostri* is a variation on the old game of playing female power within the male establishment. The Narcissus-Echo relationship is more complex. The homeopathic double bind of feminism in decolonization, seeking in the new state to cure the poison of patriarchy with the poison of the legacy of colonialism, can read it as an instantiation of an ethical dilemma: choice in no choice, attendant upon particular articulations of narcissism, ready to await the sounds to which she may give back her own words.

Back in Weber's text, let us now trace Echo's struggle to step forth. I believe her lineaments in the following passage are clear enough for me not to have to retrace them at this stage. Indeed, the mortiferous Narcissus and Echo as devious voice are indistinguishably imbricated here: "the very *Stummheit* (muteness) of the death drive precludes it from ever speaking for itself; it is inevitably dependent on another discourse to be seen or heard. And that discourse, however much it may seek to efface itself before the "silence" it seeks to articulate, is anything but innocent or neutral. The death drive may be dumb, but its articulation in a theoretical and speculative [or risky activist; see my previous paragraph (GCS)] discourse is not" (LF 129).

It is in the following passage that I find it disturbing that Echo still remains foreclosed. Weber is describing Freud's imprisonment within the discourse of the same, even as he gropes for radical difference:

[I]f Freud's initial stories deal with men, betrayal, and ingratitude, death enters the scene with—as?—the passive female. . . . The *Schicksalzug* (trait of destiny) that Freud asserts it represents, is . . . a recurrent fatality linked to the female: she either eliminates the male or is eliminated by him. But nothing is more difficult to do away with than this persistent female: you kill her once, and her soul returns, "imprisoned in a tree"; you "slash with (your) sword at (the) tall tree," and a voice comes to accuse you. The activity of the subject, in this final story, consists indeed of a repetition, but what he repeats, actively, is the narcissistic wound that never heals without leaving scars. (*LF* 134)

Freud's story comes from Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1576), a text that is itself among the European reinscriptions of Ovid. If he had paid as much attention to Ovid, the "persistent female" might have come to undo the Freudian Narcissus. In the event, I agree with Weber that "[f]or Freud . . . the stories he has told are not versions of the narrative of narcissism, but evidence of something radically different. And yet, when he seeks to describe that difference, it emerges as more of the same" (*LF* 135).

"The two sources of psychoanalytic concepts are psychoanalytic practice on the one hand, and the epistemological horizon on the other" (*Nvnm* 32). Good words, with which psychoanalysts of any school would find it hard to disagree. I have spoken only of the latter. Psychoanalytic practice, being a species of performative ethics within the calculus of professional exchange, must suit its terms to every analytic situation. An essay such as this one must remain scrupulously parasitic to that space, rather than claim it for an irresponsibilizing cultural diagnosis.

Let's step off in closing, beyond "humanity" and short of it, where Ovid and Freud are flashes of species-being in the great ecosystem of species-life. Narcissus is fixed, but Echo can disseminate. Whales, those paleo-mammals that were once creatures of the earth, *echo*-locate objects and other inhabitants in the sea world, which is not their home but merely their makeshift dwelling place. The interior of the body, inside Narcissus's carapace, can give us back echoes that hi-tech can intercept to by-pass the "Self." Ava Gerber's stunning "body art" can be an example of an impossible imitation of Echo, attending to the failed narcissism of United States body culture. Wallace Stevens's "beauty is immortal in the flesh"<sup>56</sup> celebrates every change in the flesh as beauty, down to its inscription in the economy (*Haushaltung*) of nature after what the Biblical Elders would decipher as decay and death. James Joyce is another flash in the system,

canniest of men on the track of women: "Hush! Caution! Echoland!"<sup>57</sup>

## COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

## NOTES

1 See Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York, 1983). For a socialist-feminist reading of Lasch's book, see Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh, "Narcissism and the Family: A Critique of Lasch," *New Left Review*, 135 (Sept.-Oct., 1982), 35-48.

2 See *Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry*, ed. Frédérique Delacoste and Priscilla Alexander (Pittsburgh, 1987).

3 Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and tr. James Strachey et al. (London, 1953-74), XIV, 93-94, 101; hereafter cited in text as N.

4 See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Time and Timing: Law and History," in *Chronotypes: The Construction of Time*, ed. John Bender and David Wellbery (Stanford, 1991), pp. 99-117.

5 See my "The Politics of Translation," in *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, ed. Michele Barrett and Anne Phillips (Stanford, 1992), pp. 181-84.

6 See V. S. Naipaul, *India: A Wounded Civilization* (New York, 1973), pp. 107-23; see also V. S. Naipaul, *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (New York, 1990), *passim*. In the case of the United States, here is a peculiar rag-bag, all denominated "narcissism": "After all the machinations of leftist sects, homosexual activists, self-indulgent businessmen, therapeutic functionaries, would-be and actual politicians and others, the killer continues to punctuate the real tragedy: the total domination and helplessness that define clientage in organized capitalism" (Adolph Reed, Jr., "Narcissistic Politics in Atlanta," *Telos*, 14, no. 48 [Summer 1981], 105).

7 See Jacques Derrida, "Geopsychanalyse—'and the rest of the world,'" in *Negotiations: Writings*, ed. Deborah Esch and Thomas Keenan (Minneapolis, forthcoming).

8 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," *Critical Inquiry*, 12 (1985-86), rpt. in "Race," *Writing and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago, 1986), p. 263 (wording modified).

9 "Kant's categorical imperative is thus the direct heir of the Oedipus complex" (Sigmund Freud, "The Economic Problem of Masochism," in *Standard Edition*, XIX, 16), might be the most self-assured declaration of this affiliation. For more extensive documentation, see, of course, the Kant entry in the Index to the *Standard Edition*, XXIV, 212.

10 See Bimal Krishna Matilal and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Epic and Ethic* (New York, forthcoming).

11 See Jon Elster, *Ulysses and the Sirens: Studies in Rationality and Irrationality* (Cambridge, 1979).

12 See Sigmund Freud, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," in *Standard Edition*, XXIII, 211-53; also Jacques Derrida, "The Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" tr. Mary Quaintance, *Cardozo Law Review*, 11 (1989-90), 920-1045.

13 See Bimal Krishna Matilal, *The Word and the World: India's Contribution to the Study of Language* (Delhi, 1990), pp. 70-71.

14 Investigations of Echo in Indic discourse would lead us into the rational linguistic tradition of *dhvani* and *pratidhvani*, quite apart from mythic and epic narrative.

- 15 See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, tr. Thomas M. Knox, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1975), p. 361.
- 16 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, tr. Frank Justus Miller (Loeb classical library), 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), I, 3; hereafter cited by page and line number in text as *M* (translations modified).
- 17 Sigmund Freud, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego," in *Standard Edition*, XVIII, 130.
- 18 Luce Irigaray, "Sexual Difference," tr. Seán Hand, in *French Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford, 1987), p. 122.
- 19 See Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, "Jacques Lacan: Feminism and the Problem of Gender Identity," *Sub-Stance*, 11, no. 3 (1982), 6–19.
- 20 Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Écrits: A Selection*, tr. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1977), pp. 6, 7.
- 21 Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," p. 2.
- 22 The notion of an undervalued fiction is borrowed from Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, tr. Samuel Weber (Evanston, Ill., 1988), p. 96. Jacqueline Rose indicates the difference between Freud and Lacan without commenting on the relative philosophical banality of Lacan's position. She shows that in the later Lacan the subject's move from primary to secondary narcissism is the move from the Imaginary to the Symbolic. What interests me, as my final extended comments on Claire Nouvet will show, is that although the insertion into the Symbolic seems to invite a consideration of the Echo-response situation, Rose does not mention her: "the two moments of [the mirror] phase, that of the corporeal image [which Lacan describes as primary narcissism], prior and resistant to symbolisation, and that of the *relation to the other* [the place of secondary narcissism], ultimately dependent on such symbolisation" (Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* [London, 1986], pp. 178–79).
- 23 For an extensive treatment of the Narcissus tradition and narcissism, see Louise Vinge, *The Narcissus Theme in Western European Literature Up to the Early 19th Century*, tr. Robert Dewsnap et al. (Lund, 1967). (Professor Georgia Nugent has pointed out to me that there is a mythic tradition of Echo as coupled with Pan which is rather different from the Ovidian narrative. An ethical-instantiation reading focuses on a narrativization rather than a myth. I look forward to a historical meditation upon the vicissitudes of Echo in the history of myth; but that is not my concern here.) Any consideration of Narcissus and narcissism would fall into the literary and the psychoanalytic. I have not considered them in detail in my text because they do not, strictly speaking, have much bearing on a performative ethical reading in the context of feminism in decolonization. Among the Christian allegorical readings in the *Ovid moralisé*, we find Echo interpreted as "good reputation" and, in Christine de Pisan's *Epistre d'Orthéa* as "anyone who asks for help in great need" (see Vinge, *The Narcissus Theme*, pp. 94, 101). I have no doubt that an extended look at these texts with a gender-sensitive theoretical perspective would yield exciting results. Although not particularly gender sensitive, Joseph Lowenstein's *Responsive Readings: Versions of Echo in Pastoral, Epic, and the Jonsonian Masque* (New Haven, 1984) is a more theoretical and sympathetic analysis of the trajectory of Echo than Vinge's older study. He is, however, interested in the "myth of Echo," that which remains across rhetorical narrativizations, "as the myth of cultural memory" (p. 5). His Echo is caught between "the genius of myth, of sorts" and the "phenomenology of acoustical reflection itself" (pp. 10, 9). When he speaks of ethics, he is analyzing the structuring of stories rather than the conduct of the rhetorical texture of storying as instantiations of ethical responsibility (p. 132). To be sure, the predicament of the self-conscious feminist allied by class with imperialism has something in common with the romantic



notion of the self-conscious artist as Narcissus (Rousseau's *Narcisse*, Friedrich Schlegel's *Lucinde*), for those texts emerge at the height of Western European colonialism and imperialism. The trajectory of romanticism is so well traveled that I will wait for future criticism to lay bare that common ground from this political perspective. Since Echo's role is not significantly an independent position in psychoanalytic treatments, I have paid little or no attention to the growing literature on identification from this perspective. In conclusion, I have addressed "psychoanalysis" in a general way.

24 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, unpublished earlier draft of the present essay.

25 For the definitive discussion of this passage, see John Brenkman, "Narcissus in the Text," *Georgia Review*, 30 (1976), 293–327.

26 Mahasweta Devi, "The Hunt," tr. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in *Women in Performance*, 5, no. 1 (1990), 80–92.

27 Strictly speaking, there is another bit of reported speech in the narrative. When Narcissus cries *veni!* (Come!) Ovid does not give the perfectly possible echo—*veni!* (Come!)—or even, with a little trick of vowel length, again perfectly acceptable within echo as a phenomenon, "I have come!" (I am grateful for this latter suggestion to Professor Georgia Nugent.) In this particular case, it seems as if there is an embarrassment of successful response here, as opposed to the ethically more useful bit that I discuss. And indeed the style of Ovid's reportage is also noticeably different. If in the *fugis/fugi* reporting, Ovid reports Narcissus as receiving back the words *he* said, in the *veni/veni* reporting, Ovid gives Echo a plenitude of voicing: *vocat illa vocantem* (*M*, p. 150, l. 382, she calls him calling, calls the calling one, voices the voicer). The ethical-instantiation reader must choose between a gendered agency that can speak its desire *within* gendering, where the narrator reports her (internalized constraint as a version of) fulfilled choice, or a gendered aporia that goes beyond mere (historically contaminated) intention. For our part, a greater responsibility beckons in the instantiation of the possibility that history is in all respects larger than personal goodwill.

28 The reader will notice that I too have played a translator's trick here, substituted the Greek *Lethe* for the Latin *Styx*. Latin does not have an exact equivalent of *aletheia* for truth (thereby hangs Heidegger).

29 Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Margins of Philosophy*, tr. Alan Bass (Chicago, 1982), p. 318.

30 For the importance of reported speech in the Law of Genre, we must elaborate a position from Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, tr. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (New York, 1973), p. 115 ff. I have attempted to do this in the context of multiracial representation as well (unpublished colloquium, Congress of South African Writers, Cape Town, 15 Aug. 1992).

31 Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, tr. Alan Bass (Chicago, 1987), p. 123 (translation slightly modified). Cited in Jacques Derrida, "Pour l'amour de Lacan," in Natalia S. Avtonomova et al., *Lacan avec les philosophes* (Paris, 1991), pp. 416–17.

32 See Jacques Derrida, "Le Facteur de la vérité," in *The Post Card*, pp. 413–96; also "The Force of Law," p. 981 and *passim*.

33 Assia Djebar, *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, tr. Dorothy S. Blair (New York, 1985); hereafter cited in text as *F*.

34 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, 1976), p. 175.

35 Here and elsewhere, I am struck by the affinities and differences between Djebar and Derrida, two compatriots separated by ethnocultural and sexual difference. If in *Glas* Derrida kept the name of the mother a blank by the positioning of the "L" (French *elle* = mother) on the page, and the female thing unnamed by contrasting

*Savoir absolu* to *Sa* (the third person singular genitive with an unspecified female object), Djébar keeps the autobiographical culture-divided female subject's name a blank by the ruse of proper naming. (*Sa* is everywhere in Derrida, *Glas*, tr. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand [Lincoln, Nebr., 1986]. For the placing of the "L," see p. 261b.)

36 See the listing under *tzarl-rit*, in *Dictionnaire pratique arabe-français*, ed. Marcelin Beaussier (1871; rpt. Algiers, 1958); quoted in *F*, p. 221 (my emphasis).

37 See the listing under *tzarl-rit*, in *Dictionnaire arabe-français*, ed. Albert de Biberstein-Kazimirski (Paris, 1860); quoted in *F*, p. 221 (my emphasis).

38 In the context of a traditional culture that is fully oral, I would like to refer here to the African National Congress Women's Charter of 1954 (see Raymond Suttner and Jeremy Cronin, *30 Years of the Freedom Charter* [Johannesburg, 1986], pp. 162–64).

39 See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, 1988), p. 296–97.

40 Assia Djébar, "Forbidden Gaze, Severed Sound," in her *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment*, tr. Marjolijn de Jager (Charlottesville, Va., 1992).

41 Claire Nouvet, "An Impossible Response: The Disaster of Narcissus," *Yale French Studies*, 79 (1991), 103–34; hereafter cited in text as IR. I am grateful to Dorothea von Mücke for bringing this essay to my attention.

42 IR, p. 111. Yet on the next page, Nouvet makes a peculiarly characterological move by assigning to Narcissus one, rather than another, phenomenal affect—fear rather than pride—and constructs a new reading on it. As the next sentence of my text will suggest, such a slippage is good "polytheist" practice, and problematic only if one sees character and figure in opposition.

43 I have commented on the "monotheist" habit of the imagining of the subject of the ethical decision in a number of texts; most accessibly in my "Not Virgin Enough . . .," in my *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York, forthcoming) and in Matlal and Spivak, *Epic and Ethic*.

44 Derrida, "The Force of Law," p. 967.

45 Jacques Derrida, "Mochlos or the Conflict of the Faculties," tr. Richard Rand and Amy Wygant, in *Logomachia: The Conflict of the Faculties Today* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1992); the French original of this quotation is to be found in Jacques Derrida, *Du droit à la philosophie* (Paris, 1990), pp. 408, 424.

46 Incidentally, this shift is reflected in Derrida's move from "reticen[ce]" because the ethical "presupposes . . . the self" (Jacques Derrida and Pierre-Jean Labarrière, *Altérités* [Paris, 1986], p. 76; cited in IR, p. 103) to ethics as "the *experience* of the impossible" ("The Force of Law," p. 981, emphasis mine); that this move is particularly significant for Derrida is indicated by the fact that in the latter Derrida is citing an earlier piece by himself.

47 Is this because of Lacan's unseen presence? "Two factors emerge from this preliminary delineation of the Imaginary—the factor of aggression, rivalry, the image as alienating on the one hand, and the more structurally oriented notion of a fundamental mis-recognition as the foundation of subjectivity, with the image as salutary fiction, on the other" (Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, p. 175). The difference between the subject's history and mythic story being that in myth it is a "knowledge" rather than a misrecognition, and the fiction is not "salutary" in a curative sense. Oedipus does sleep with his mother, he does not just want to.

48 See Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, tr. Ann Smock (Lincoln, Nebr., 1986), p. 125 ff.; cited in IR, p. 128 ff.

49 See André Green, *Narcissisme de vie, narcissisme de mort* (Paris, 1983); hereafter cited in text as *Nvm* (my translations).

50 Luce Irigaray will undo this in her brilliant *Je, tu, nous: Pour une culture de la différence* (Paris, 1990), forthcoming in English (New York).

51 Incidentally, this would enrich and dislocate Lacan's geometry of the gaze in interesting ways.

52 The best reading within this epistemology is Juliet Mitchell's (although I am not sure why she writes that "Narcissus never believed that what he saw in the pond's mirror was himself"): "the mirror did not give him himself, because the only one in the world he had to tell him where he was, was Echo, the absolute *other*, to whom none could get attached because she would not listen [why?] and who did no more than repeat the words of Narcissus's own self-fascination. But no one could have done any more; for Narcissus is confined in intra-subjectivity" (Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* [Harmondsworth, 1975], pp. 38, 39).

53 Samuel Weber, *The Legend of Freud* (Minneapolis, 1982); hereafter cited in text as *LF*.

54 As Jacqueline Rose has pointed out, in the mature Lacan the Imaginary slides into the Symbolic, primary into secondary narcissism. A single sentence will have to suffice here: "Hence, the *symbolic* equation that we rediscover between these objects arises from an alternating mechanism of expulsion and introjection, of projection and absorption, that is to say from an *imaginary* interplay" (Jacques Lacan, "The Topic of the Imaginary," in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book I, Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-54*, tr. John Forrester [New York, 1988], p. 82; emphasis mine). This is still, of course, a continuist simplification of Freud's discontinuous dynamics, what Weber calls "the play of speculation." I refer my reader to Freud's reverse definitions of speculation and science, quoted on page 20.

55 শুক বলে আমায় কৃষ্ণ গিরি ঈদেছিল।

আসী বলে আমায় রাধা শক্তি প্রকাশিল, ইহনে শ্যবে কেন?

56 See Wallace Stevens, "Peter Quince at the Clavier," in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York, 1982), p. 91. The lines of the poem read, "Beauty is momentary in the mind— / . . . But in the flesh it is immortal."

57 James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York, 1939), p. 13.