IMAGE AND COUNTER-IMAGE: REFLECTING OVID AND AUDIENCE IN THE OLD FRENCH *LAI DE NARCISUS*

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The classically inspired Old French texts likely composed at the mid-twelfth century Plantagenet court can be separated into two distinct groups. Where the writers of the *romans antiques* composed lengthy epic poems that illustrate the theme of *translatio studii* and *imperii*,[1] other poets composed short, Ovidian-based texts that focus on love and human relationships.[2] This striking difference in length and theme suggests that these poems were directed towards different subsections of the courtly audience.

A close look at one of these shorter texts, the *Lai de Narcisus* (c. 1160-65),[3] suggests that this division was based in part on gender, and that these shorter works were intended primarily for an audience of women, like that of the twelfth-century *cambre as dames* (or ladies' chamber).[4] In reworking Ovid's Narcissus story, the anonymous OF poet reverses main elements and gender roles, re-centering the story to emphasize the feminine. Where Ovid encloses Echo's story within that of Narcissus, the OF poet encloses the tale of Narcisus within that of the daughter of the king of Thebes, Dané, who serves as Echo's medieval equivalent. Even the central image of the poem is reversed: the medieval Narcisus sees a woman reflected in the pool rather than the youth seen by his Ovidian predecessor. This paradox therefore hints at a greater truth. As the essay that follows will demonstrate, the author of the *Narcisus* provides a gloss[5] on Ovid that uses the mirror image of gender to renew Ovid's meaning for a twelfth-century public.

As the OF poet proves an apt student of Ovid, a brief look at some

of the themes in the classical Narcissus story is in order. The question of gender is already of central importance here, for Ovid sets up the tale in Book III of the *Metamorphoses* as part of an ongoing discussion of masculine and feminine perspective. He does so in part by placing the tale within the context of the quarrel between Jupiter and Juno over whether women receive more pleasure in love than men do (*Metamorphoses* III 320-21).[6] Jupiter contends that they do, but Juno disagrees. Tiresias, who is asked to arbitrate because he lived part of his life as a woman, sides with Jupiter. Angered, Juno blinds him, but as compensation Jupiter gifts him with prophetic sight (III 331-38). Ovid thus sets the stage for the Narcissus story with a conflict between men and women in which the players side with members of their own gender.

His tale of Narcissus and Echo springs from this conflict and draws on the themes from the quarrel scene. Both Echo and Narcissus share characteristics with Jupiter and Juno. Moreover, the notion of male blindness - highlighted in Juno's punishment of Tiresias - serves as a main link. Jupiter and Narcissus are both blinded by their own desires to the suffering of their female counterparts. Jupiter constantly humiliates Juno through his philandering, and adds insult to injury through his flippant remarks ("lite iocosa"; III 332) about women's pleasure in love. Both action and insult demonstrate a lack of compassion and a blindness to consequences. Narcissus' blindness has a similar effect: he is so full of pride ("superbia"; III 354) that he refuses to love at all. This attitude leads him to repudiate Echo cruelly, humiliating her in the process.

Echo's link to the quarrel is even more direct, for she becomes an active participant. When Jupiter dallies with the nymphs, she protects him from discovery by Juno (III 363), thereby committing a triple wrong. Not only does she cover up Jupiter's misconduct, she does so at the expense of Juno's argument. Even worse, she does so by allying herself with the male side. Accordingly, she too exhibits a lack of compassion and regard for consequences. When Juno punishes Echo by taking away her voice, the penalty fits the crime. Unable to speak, Echo can no longer initiate amatory discourse, and therefore cannot

persuade Narcissus to love her (Knoespel 7). Juno thus chastises Echo not just by limiting her speech (Harrison 324), but also by preventing her success in love.

Ovid thereby ties the evolution and welfare of the couple Narcissus-Echo to the battle between Jupiter and Juno. Like their divine counterparts, Echo and Narcissus are doomed never to unite as a couple and to waste away as unhappy individuals (Harrison 325). Narcissus, like Jupiter, remains at the mercy of his own desires and cannot move beyond a love of himself. However, unlike Jupiter and Narcissus, Echo undergoes an evolution. Juno's punishment causes the nymph to know rejection in love, and from this she learns sympathy for others. While still angry with Narcissus, she empathizes with his plight. By echoing his last farewell with her own (III 494-96), she voices her compassion and shows what she has learned. For this, Echo receives her final reward: Ovid's skillful use of written language overcomes her oral handicap and allows her story to be heard (Knoespel 9). While Ovid recounts the stories of other punished characters, rarely does the act of tale-telling involve the breaking of a God-imposed silence. Hence, in causing the nymph's echo, as it were, to find its place in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid appears to mediate between the Echo and the Gods, composing in her stead the story that transmits the lesson.

Ovid's story of Echo and Narcissus thus becomes a kind of commentary on the question of which sex receives more pleasure in love. The Roman poet, however, proves a more circumspect arbitrator of the quarrel than Tireseas, for he brings the futility of the question to the fore. Neither Echo nor Narcissus can be said to have received pleasure in love. In fact, both die from an excess of desire and even death does not provide a union for them. Nothing can bring together a narcissus flower and an echo save perhaps an accident of place – or Ovid's own narrative in which their individual stories are intertwined. Nevertheless, in showing Echo's grief for the dying Narcissus – and in composing a fable that affords the lovers their only real union – Ovid demonstrates his understanding of Juno's lesson: that a little compassion goes a long way.

In adapting Ovid's tale for a twelfth-century audience, the poet of

the *Lai de Narcisus* takes up the classical poet's role as commentator. Despite its separation in the manuscript tradition from its Ovidian source, the OF text retains the shadow of the quarrel between Jupiter and Juno.[7] In the *Narcisus*, however, the poet abandons Ovid's carefully constructed neutrality and literally recasts the story from a feminine perspective. This new dynamic, made evident in the Prologue and further developed through a striking amplification of the role of the main female protagonist, is joined by other inversions of character and scene. These role-reversals – in themselves opposite reflections of the classical text – are central both to the character development of Narcisus and Dané and to the lessons they learn.

In the Prologue, the OF poet addresses women and privileges their experience. During a discussion of love and its dangers, the narrator enjoins any woman who is approached by a man in the throes of "fole amor" (mad love; *Narcisus* 18), to listen kindly to his requests:

Lors est il bien raisons et drois
Que cele en oie sa proiiere
Ne ne soit pas vers li trop fiere,
Ke tost en poeut avoir damage
Par son orgeul, par son outraige. (*Narcisus* 20-24)

It is appropriate and right that she hear his prayer, and that she not be too proud towards him, for harm may soon come of it through her pride and her arrogance. [8]

The poem does not condemn those who fail in this respect except to say that great harm can come from the arrogant treatment of a potential lover. In contrast, men who refuse the requests of women are to be "burned or hanged":

Et s'il avient que femme prit,
Qui que il soit qui l'escondit,
Je voel et di sans entreprendre
Que on le doit ardoir u pendre. (*Narcisus* 29-32)

And if it happens that a woman begs a man for his love, if he rejects her, whoever he may be, I insist and maintain without

more ado, that he should be burnt or hanged (Eley 33).

This disparity signals a reference to Ovid's text but inverts the situation there. Where the Ovidian tale opens with Tireseas' judgment in favor of Jupiter and his maseuline viewpoint, the OF poem opens with the opposite perspective. By cleverly recalling and then reversing the Ovidian context, the poet of the *Narcisus* mirrors Ovid's text, and signals an intention to gloss it by taking the opposite approach.

Similarly, the twelfth-century poet introduces Narcisus, not as the beloved child of a nymph, but as an example of what happens to men who reject women cruelly:

De maintes gens avons veü
Qu'il lor en est mesavenu.
Narcisus, qui fu mors d'amer,
Nous doit essanple demostrer.
Amors blasmoit et sa poisçance,
Ki puis en prist aspre venjance:
A tel amor le fist aclin
Dont il reçut mort en la fin. (*Narcisus* 33-40)

We have seen many eases of people who have suffered as a result of this; Narcisus, who died of love, ought to provide us with an example. He criticized Love and his power, who later took harsh revenge on him, making him thc victim of such love that he eventually died of it (Eley 33).

In transforming Narcisus into an example of how men should not behave towards women, the poet reeasts him through the perspective of feminine experience. This shift likewise signals the poet's intention not only to tell the story from Dané's perspective (Yates 24), but also to employ her tale as the frame narrative. The result is an inversion of the situation in Ovid's text, where Echo's tale is ancillary to Narcissus'. Consequently, the poem becomes the story of the female protagonist, in a sense replacing the *lai* of Narcisus with a *lai* of Dané.[9]

In accordance with these intentions, the OF poet represents Narcisus as the object of feminine gazc and desire. This is accomplished through

an *amplification*[10] of Narcisus' physical portrait, which becomes much more detailed than that of Narcissus in Ovid's version.[11] Conversely, the twelfth-century poet pays much less attention to the physical qualities of Dané. This contrast is immediately evident, for the beginning section of the poem contains seventy verses depicting Narcisus (*Narcisus* 59-105, 113-25, and 132-40) but only four depicting Dané (127-30). We see Narcisus as if through Dané's eyes: he is "gens" (beautiful of body; 61), he is a "bele creature" (handsome creature; 62), he has "eus rians" (smiling eyes; 71) that are "sinples et vairs, clers et luisans" (soft and gray-blue, brilliant and sparkling; 72), teeth as white as snow (79), a beautiful face and nose (77-78), etc. Throughout, the emphasis remains on a female reaction to Narcisus: "Amor" (Love) makes him desirable, adding a "doç regart" (sweet gaze) that inflames others with passion (75-76), and he has breath so sweet that a woman could not help but fall in love with him just by inhaling it:

> Et quant ele ot fete la bouce,
> Amors une douçor i touce:
> Femme qui une fois la sent
> De s'amor alume et esprent. (*Narcisus* 86-89)
>
> And when she [Nature] had made the mouth, Love endows it with a sweetness such that a woman who experiences it once is set on fire and burns with love for him (Eley 34).

By developing the description of Narcisus to such an extent, and by basing this development on female reaction to him, the poet not only establishes Narcisus as an attractive love prospect but also further orients the tale towards a feminine public. At least on the physical level, Narcisus is a hero worthy of Dané's attraction and capable of feeding the imagination of the audience. Consequently, Narcisus appears as the object of female desire even before Dané sets eyes on him from her tower.

Likewise, Narcisus' less desirable traits are presented as they relate to a feminine perspective. He knows nothing of love and even fears women: "D'amer n'a soing ne rien n'en set: / Dames en canbres fuit

et het." (For love he had no care nor does he know anything about it; Ladies in chambers he flees and hates; *Narcisus* 119-20). This fear and dislike comes across as extreme and emphasizes the central irony that someone so attractive to the opposite sex should be so uninterested in love. Moreover, if, as seems likely, the story was performed in a *canbre as dames*, the reference to ladies in chambers creates a kind of internal joke between audience and poet or performer.[12] The narrative situation of the poem's performance would then be exactly the type of situation that Narcisus detests. By providing such a desirable portrait of the hero, and by engaging the audience through this sort of humor, the poet invites the public to participate with Dané in the painful experience of rejection as well as in the punishment and eventual absolution of Narcisus.

In contrast, the details of Dané's physical appearance are much less important. Although she is beautiful, she is not the object of Narcisus' desire (nor presumably, the desire of the audience of the work): indeed, Narcisus will have nothing to do with her. Accordingly, the poet's preliminary portrait of Dané is a remarkably concise vignette of four verses which indicates her social rank and overall beauty, but little else:

La fille au roi de la cité
Des fenestres a jus gardé.
Dané ot non la damoisele,
En tote Tebles n'ot si bele. (*Narcisus* 127-30)

The daughter of the king of the city looked down from the windows. The young noblewoman was called Dané; there was none so lovely in the whole of Thebes (Elcy 37).

As Yates notes, the poet adheres to very conventional formulae in describing Dané (32). In fact, no further details are forthcoming until just after the midpoint of the poem, when Dané meets Narcisus in the woods so she can reveal her love and ask for his in return. After Narcisus laughs at her request, Dané sheds her cloak to stand naked in front of him, in the hopes that beauty will work where words fail. The ensuing portrait of nakedness, which would ordinarily provoke male desire, again remains remarkably brief at eleven verses:

Tote est nue, le cors a bel.
Tant l'a destrainte la frouidure
Et la voie, qui trop est dure,
Li sans li saut parmi l'orteil,
Qui tot le pié li fait vermeill.
L'iaue li ciet aval la face.
Il voit scs mains qu'el goint et lace,
Nues, sans gans et sans orfrois,
Qui plus sont blances que n`est nois
La car blace sor la cemise:
Nule pités ne l'en est prise. (*Narcisus* 510-20).

...[She] is totally naked; her body beautiful. The cold has afflicted her so much, and the road, which is very rough, that blood pours from her toes and makes her whole foot scarlet. Tears run down her face. He sees her hands, which she joins together and interlaces, naked, without gloves and without ornament, those hands which are whiter than snow; [he sees] her white flesh above her shift; yet he takes no pity on her. (Translation modified from Eley 53).

In this passage, the poet focuses more on Dané's vulnerability than on her beauty. Even her bleeding feet and white skin, which evoke the red and white imagery normally associated with love,[13] here inspire pity and indignation at Narcisus' cruel rejection. They also underscore Dané's inability to make Narcisus see her as an objcct of desire. Because the sight of her naked body has no effcct on him, the poet never describes her beauty in detail. Instead, the portrait seems calculated to cnlist audienee sympathy for the rejeeted heroine.

Similarly, in reconstrueting the story from Dané's perspective, the poet carefully portrays love's effect on her. The sleepless night she spends after she first falls in love with Narcisus is a ease in point. Dané's discomfort and frustration are masterfully portrayed, and eli-eit audience sympathy through their realism: "Torne et retorne, veut dormir, / Mais ne poeut estre, Amors ne[l] lait" (She tosses and turns,

and wants to sleep, but cannot for Love does not permit it; *Narcisus* 182-83). This sympathy also extends to the women of the household, aud demonstrates the poet's keen understanding of their domestic relationship to a young unmarried lady of Dané's rank. When Dané blames her insomnia on the bed, which she says is too hard ("Or resent je trop dur mon lit"; *Narcisus* 189), she becomes convinced that it was not made up properly.

Hau! or me sui apercëue:
Pas n'est la coute bien meüe.
Ne quit que onques fust tornee:
La plume i est amoneelee.
Queus merveille est ce que je veil? (*Narcisus* 193-96)

Oh! Now I have realized that my mattress has not been shaken well. I don't believe it was ever turned: the feathers in it are matted. Is it a wonder that I cannot sleep?

Consequently, she wakes her women up and makes them do it again. What follows is a delightful description of bed-making which details the process as well as all the different parts of the bed (sheets, pillow, mattress, straw):

Si vait au lit a sa meschine,
Lever le fait, si li a dit
Que li reface tost son lit.
Cele si fait eneslespas,
Oste le *cou[te]* et tout les *dras*,
Si remue neïs *l'estrain*.
Ele meïsme i met la main,
Torne, retorne, fiert e bat,
Or le veut haut, or le veut plat,
Or veut haut cief, or veut bas piés,
Or est li *cavés* trop bassiés,
Or est estrois, or est trop grans,
Or est a une part pendans.

La norice vait maudisçant
Por çou qu'il n'est a son talent. (*Narcisus* 202-16; my emphasis)

[She] goes to her nurse's bed. She makes her get up, and told her to remake her bed completely. The nurse does so straightaway: takes off the *feather mattress* and all the bedclothes, and even plumps up the *straw* base. Dané herself lends a hand, turns it over and over, pummels and beats it; Now she wants it plumped up, now she wants it flattened, now she wants it high at the top, now high at the bottom, Now it is too low at the *head*, now it is narrow, now it is too wide, now it is hanging down at one side. She curses the nurse because it is not to her liking. (Eley 41)

This description is remarkable for its realism, particularly in evoking the physical effort involved. With the rhythm of the line, "Torne, retorne, fiert e bat" (209), one almost feels the weight of the mattress, as well as the women's frustration at not being able to plump it to their mistress' satisfaction. The realistic description hints at a universal: just about everyone has spent a sleepless night, at one point or another, pining for love. Moreover, the focus here on the *process* of bed-making (to my knowledge unparalleled in OF poetry[14]), added to a clear understanding of the workings of a noble household, lend the passage a remarkable authenticity. Clearly, it is intended for an audience familiar with these rituals, an audience that will find the whole situation as comic as it is sympathetic. Again, I would suggest that this is the audience of a *canbre as dames*, and that this passage is intended to appeal to both the high- and low-ranking members of this public.

In addition to the main inversions discussed thus far, the poet of the *Lai de Narcisus* creates a number of role reversals that fall along gender lines. As Thiry-Stassin and others have demonstrated, the OF poet bases aspects of both Dané and Narcisus on the figures of Apollo and Daphne found in Book I of the *Metamorphoses*.[15] Yet here, in rewriting the story for a twelfth-century audience, the poet reverses the genders of Ovid's characters, "fashion[ing] from Apollo a love-seeking Dané

who takes the initiative" and from Daphne "a Narcissus even further removed from amorous temptation" (Thiry-Stassin, "Source Ovidienne" 219). The transformation from masculine to feminine and vice versa is consistent with the notion of reflection: like a mirror, or Narcisus' pool, the OF poem shows the "opposite" of Ovid's tale.

The punishment of Narcisus provides a particularly good example. In Ovid, Narcissus is made to fall in love with his own image after a youth, whose love he spurned, prays to the gods for vengeance. In the OF poem, it is Dané's prayer that brings on the punishment of Narcisus. In addition to the gender reversal, this again serves to focus the story on Dané and the feminine experience. Moreover, the object of Narcissus' affections, a "puer" (boy; III 454) in the *Metamorphoses*, undergoes a transformation in the OF poem. Narcisus sees a shadow in the fountain that he thinks is a "fee de mer" (sea fairy; *Narcisus* 647) a "ninphe" (nymph; 677) a "duesse" (goddess; 678) or a "fee" (fairy; 678), all of which are feminine in OF. Hence, in contrast to his Ovidian counterpart, Narcisus falls in love with a female image. A final role reversal in the OF flows in the opposite direction: where Ovid credits the goddess Nemesis with Narcissus' punishment, the OF poet attributes this to the god Amor (*Narcisus* 36-40, cited above). In this fashion, the OF poem inverts the entire set of relationships surrounding Narcisus' punishment, replacing male figures with female ones and vice versa.

The complex nature of these reversals offers clues to the greater transformation of the work into a specular inversion, or reflection, of Ovid's text. These indicators, from the championing of women in the Prologue, to the orientation of the portrait of Narcisus, to the various reversals seen here, are too numerous to allow for mere coincidence. Instead, they are part of the poet's overarching plan for the work, a way to advance a lesson in compassion presented through fable and image.

Through foregrounding the woman's side of the story, the poet leads the audience to side with Dané and therefore to condemn Narcisus for his unkind treatment of her. For these reasons, when Narcisus replies to Dané's impassioned appeal for his love with laughter ("si s'en rist";

483) and cruel words ("Par Diu, pucele, mout es fole"; 485), he merits the punishment promised in the Prologue. Dané's anger and her wish for vengeance are made understandable. Moreover, because her prayer to the gods comes from a recognizable hurt, that prayer appears appropriate, even though it is perhaps just as cruel as Narcisus' mockery of her.

Conversely, Narcisus' complaints under the influence of love come across as selfish and self-centered. The emphasis in his speeches is often on himself, on a "je" that does not recognize the wishes or desires of the other. For example, when he asks the reflection why she appears to withdraw from his presence, he emphasizes only his own worthiness:

> Por qu'es orgelleuse vers moi?
> Ne sui gaires mains biaus de toi!
> Maintes fois ai esté requis,
> Or sui de male ardor espris [...] (*Narcisus* 683-85)
>
> Why are you so haughty towards me? I am hardly less beautiful than you. I have received many offers of love; Now I burn with a terrible fire...(Eley 61).

In yet another inversion, however, Narcisus finds himself in the same position as the women he rejected. Placed in their shoes, he begins to gain some measure of compassion and understanding for those whom he caused to suffer. His speech changes tone to reflect this new thought: "Or sen je bien com lor estoit / Qu'eles se plaoignoient a droit." (Now I understand how it was for them, and realize that they had reason to complain; *Narcisus* 687-88). The very idea of role-reversal is integral to Narcisus' lesson, both for the audience and for the character himself. Yet the process of metamorphosis is not as swift for the OF Narcisus as it was in the Ovidian text. It is only when Narcisus recognizes Amor's teachings (*Narcisus* 767-71) and begs for mercy ("Et je mout doucement te pri / Que tu aies de moi merci"; 787-88) that he finally begins to recognize the image he sees in the pool for what it is:

> Lors conoist qu'il est deceüs
> Et voit que c'est unbres qu'il ainme.

Mout par se blasme et fol se clainme,
Et neporquant ne set que faire:
Son corage n'en puet retraire;
Desvoiés est, ne set guencir
N'a droite voie revenir. (*Narcisus* 828-34)

Then he realizes he has been deceived, and sees that he is in love with a reflection. He reproaches himself bitterly and calls himself a fool, and yet he does not know what to do. He cannot turn his heart away from it. He has lost his way, he cannot change tack or come back to the right path (Eley 67).

Finally understanding, he condemns his own folly saying, "J'aim moi meïsme, c'est folie!" (I love myself, it is madness!; *Narcisus* 863). Narcisus thus echoes his own mocking speech to Dané, in which he reproached her for her folly and her comportment. Dying far from friends and family, and finding himself in the grips of an even greater "fole amor" (mad love), Narcisus comprehends the losses he so cruelly inflicted on Dané.

His last speech demonstrates his regret and his realization that Dané could have been a worthy partner:

Ahi, las! tant par fui vilains
Et de grant felonie plains,
E tant fui dors et de mal aire
Ke el onques ne me pot plaire!
Bien me devoit maus avenir
Quant onques ne le voil oïr. (*Narcisus* 939-44)

Ah, alas! I was so base and so totally heartless, and I was so callous and ill-natured that she could never please me at all [...] I deserved to come to grief when I was never prepared to listen to her! (Eley 72-73).

Having come to this realization, he prays that she may appear and turn his heart from this mad love. Unfortunately, this thought comes too late, as Narcisus faints and loses his power of speech. Transformed

in his last hour into a pale shadow of Ovid's Echo, Narcisus can no longer initiate the amatory discourse that might save him.

Nevertheless, Dané manages to breach his silence. Arriving after he can no longer speak, she reads his gestures and interprets his meaning. Then, as Ovid does for Echo, Dané speaks for Narcisus, articulating his silent message aloud, and telling his story for him:

> Ahi! fait ele, dous amis,
> Com estes de la mort soupris!
> Biau sanlant me volés mostrer,
> Mais ne poés a moi parler. (*Narcisus* 983-86)
>
> "Ah," she says, "sweet love, how death has taken possession of you! You are trying to show me that you care for me, but you cannot speak to me (Eley 73).

By mirroring his experience in her own words, Dané recognizes her own responsibility for his death. As she says, "Lasse, ma proiiere l'a mort!" (Alas, my prayer killed him!; *Narcisus* 991). Her prayers to Venus and Amor, though justified, have brought down a terrible punishment, not just on Narcisus but also on herself. Horrified at what she has done, and overcome by her love for Narcisus, Dané wills herself to join him in death. The lovers die in each other's arms, joined by their newly found compassion and their understanding of the pain they have caused.

The OF poet thus rewrites Ovid's tale from a feminine perspective, and transforms characters and scenes to bring a lesson in compassion to the forefront of the text. The metamorphosis in the final scene – Narcisus taking on Echo's voicelessness, and Dané assuming Ovid's role as the voice of her lover[16] – renders this lesson even more clear. In taking away Narcisus' powers of speech at the very end of the poem, the poet causes him to experience life from Echo's point of view. Similarly, when Dané tells Narcisus' story, she understands his viewpoint and comprehends the consequences of her own actions. With this reversal, the poet breaks down the barrier between masculine and feminine, between the initiator of amatory discourse and the recipient of that

request. From this tragic example, the poet hopes to save other lovers from the same kind of fate.

Plainly, this transformation of Ovid's text, with its emphasis on female experience, represents a gloss on the themes of the original. The poet employs the idea of reflection – so central to the Narcissus story – to complete Ovid's meaning within a twelfth-century context. In this way, the OF poem becomes a gendered, mirror image of the classical text. Ovid recounts the tale of Narcissus in which he embeds Echo's story. In contrast, the OF poet reworks Ovid's narrative as the tale of Dané [Echo] in which is enclosed the story of Narcisus. The subsequent inversions, such as the OF Narcisus' belief that he sees a female figure in the fountain instead of the youth of Ovid's text, would spring naturally from the original inversion. The focus on the feminine makes this a complementary piece to Ovid's text, and orients it most precisely (as testified by the various references within the text) for the type of feminine audience that may have surrounded the court of Eleanor of Aquitaine.[17]

It would be useful, however, to take a step further and consider the possibility that the poet of the OF *Lai de Narcisus* was herself a woman.[18] While neither the amplification of the character of Dané, nor the inversion of perspective present in the OF *Narcisus* can prove absolutely female authorship of this anonymous text, it is not outside the realm of possibility. Another female poet known as Marie de France[19] worked at roughly the same time: Eley and others place the date of the *Narcisus* around 1165, making it contemporaneous with Marie's *Lais* (Eley 10). Moreover, the ramifications of feminine authorship have implications for an understanding of the poem and of the way in which the OF poet has transformed the story. If Ovid, a famed male poet, is replaced – or reflected – by his "opposite," an anonymous, twelfth-century female poet, the entire adaptation of the poem is based on inversions which stem from or culminate in the transposition between the poets themselves. The OF poem thus becomes a mirror image of Ovid's text in a much greater sense.

While the OF poet does not choose to name herself in the manner

of someone like Marie de France, the metaphor of the reflecting pool provides the necessary clues. In presenting the narrative as a feminine reflection of Ovid's tale, the poet remains as elusive as Narcisus' water nymph, hidden beneath the surface of the text or of the water. Yet in glossing Ovid's tale, the poet leads the audience and characters to see reality beyond the confining image of the self. Only through an understanding of the other, can one attain a love that is worthy of preservation, or as she says, "bien loiaus a maintenir" (*Narcisus* 28). Thus the very idea of reflection both conceals and reveals at the same time it teaches compassion, love, and feminine perspective as part of human experience.

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NOTES

[1] The poets of these texts demonstrate a remarkable consciousness of the "monumental" historical importance of their subject and of their poetic endeavor. Benoît de Sainte-Maure, for example, claims to recount a "saveirs" (knowledge; *Troie* 14) that consists of "grant ovre" and "grant fait" (great works; great deeds; 41). Similarly, the poet of the *Roman de Thèbes* takes pleasure in recounting "chose digne de remembrer" (things worthy of remembrance; 12). These texts follow the precepts of *translatio studii* and *imperii* described by Chrétien de Troyes in the prologue to *Cligés* (30-35).

[2] While the *romans antiques* also develop the theme of love, it is not their central concern but remains subservient to the larger theme of *translatio studii* and *imperii*. For example, in the *Roman d'Énéas*, Énéas' love for Dido hinders his progress towards completing the task set for him by the gods: to found a new Troy in Italy. Énéas must leave Dido to accomplish this task. In contrast, his love for Lavinia advances this aim: through marrying her he gains the throne of Italy and founds a lineage that gives life to Romulus, legendary founder of Rome.

[3] For a discussion of date, see Eley 10-11. The *Lai de Narcisus* appears primarily as a discrete tale within manuscripts that are collections of short stories. For general information on the MS containing

the *Narcisus*, see Thiry-Stassin and Tyssens 17-19; Branciforti provides detailed descriptions of the contents of MSS *A* (B.N.f.fr. 837), *B* (B.N.f.fr. 19152), and *D* (Berlin Staatsbibliothek, Hamilton 257) 80-89. Old French citations of the *Narcisus* are taken from Thiry-Stassin.

[4] In contrast, the *romans antiques* appear to have been composed for a primarily masculine audience. For example, the poet of the *Roman de Thèbes* elearly intends his poem for a chivalrie audienee composed of clerks and knights ("clerc ou ehivaler"; 14), the only audienee he considers worthy of his efforts (*Thèbes* 13-16).

[5] In the prologue to the *Lais* attributed to Marie de France, a work roughly contemporaneous to the *Narcisus*, the poet invites her audience to "gloser la letter" or "gloss" her text (15). Foulet and Uitti suggest that in doing so, she intends for others to "explicate [her] words and eomplete (i.e. render more explieit) the meaning" of her text (246). Hence, in creating a "gloss" on Ovid, the *Narcisus* poet follows traditional twelfth-century scholarly praetiee.

[6] All quotations, translations and line referenees to the *Metamorphoses* refer to the Loeb edition.

[7] See note 3 above for a description of the manuscript tradition.

[8] Unless otherwise noted, translations are mine.

[9] As Eley notes, nowhere in the text is there any indieation of a specific title for this work (Introduction, 12). While none of the manuscripts include the name of Dané in their title, the manuscript evidence appears inconclusive: all four manuscripts postdate the composition of the poem by a fairly large margin; only three provide any kind of name designation; of these, MS C's title is written in a different hand than the text itself (see Thierry-Stassin 17-19 and Eley, Introduction 12-13). Eley entitles her translation *Narcisus et Dané* in order to underline the similarities between this text and its near contemporary, *Piramus et Tisbé*, which may have been composed by the same poet (Introduction 13).

[10] During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the rhetorical technique of *amplificatio* (amplification) was commonly employed by scholars who sought to gloss or expand on a subject. In his *Poetria*

nova Geoffrey of Vinsauf suggests amplification as a means to vary a topic by its "development" or "expansion". See Faral, 61ff.

[11] Ovid's first description of Narcissus is particularly brief: he has a "tenera...forma" (slender form; III 354). Later, when Narcissus gazes into the pool at his own image, the description is more detailed, but remains brief in comparison with the OF poet's lengthy amplification of it: "spectat humi positus geminum, sua lumina, sidus et dignos Baccho, dignos et Apolline crines inpubesque genas et eburnea colla decusque oris et in niveo mixtum candore roborem" (Prone on the ground, he gazes at his eyes, twin stars, and his locks, worthy of Bacchus, worthy of Apollo; on his smooth cheeks, his ivory neck, the glorious beauty of his face, the blush mingled with snowy white...; III 419-423).

[12] This is certainly the type of performance situation depicted in Wace's *Brut*, in which Arthur and Guinevere celebrate their coronation with separate ceremonies, feasts and entertainments for each gender (10445-58).

[13] White and red imagery is common in twelfth-century romance. Chrétien's Perceval, for example, sees the image of his beloved's face when he looks at the three drops of blood in the snow (*Perceval ou le Conte du Graal* 4187ff).

[14] Although specific vocabulary pertaining to beds appears in many other OF works, they are rarely described in much detail and are usually already made. Even in Marie's *lai le Fresne* when the heroine oversees the preparation of the bedchamber for her lover and is bride, the servants have already made up the bed: "...le lit orent apresté/Un covertur unt sus jeté" (the bed was prepared; a spread thrown over it; *Fresne* 397-98). Fresne merely replaces the unacceptable spread with her own, richer one. Similarly, in the Vie *de St. Alexis*, the saint's father unknowingly provides a bed for his son, yet the poet emphasizes the gift to the saint rather than the preparation of the bed itself: "Dunc le menat andreit suz le degrét: / Fait li sun lit o il pot reposer" (He then led him right under the staircase; made him a bed where he could rest; *Alexis* 231-32).

[15] See Thiry-Stassin "Source Ovidienne" (219 ff.). See also Murray's

discussion of the *Lai de Narcisus* (70-88, esp. 71, 87).

[16] In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid serves as Echo's voice by telling her story when she is no longer able to speak.

[17] Literary and historical evidence testify to a separation in the court of Henry II of England and his wife Eleanor. They clearly spent much time apart, at separate courts throughout their marriage. A good historical summary is contained in Owen's chronology (218-25). See also the discussion of the literary evidence from Wace's *Brut* above (Note 12).

[18] While many have noted the OF poet's amplification of Dané's character and the various gender reversals (see for ex., Yates and Thirry-Stassin "Source Ovidienne"), the possibility that the *Narcisus* poem was composed by a woman seems never to have been seriously considered.

[19] The name "Marie de France" is a sixteenth-century appellation, coined by Président Fauchet, based on v. 4 from the Epilogue to the *Fables*: "Marie ai nom, si sui de France" (Marie is my name, I am from France; Rychner, *Introduction* vii).

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