



An Introduction to Narcissism



Outline

- Overall Introduction to the Dialogue of Self-love
 - Explanations in Lasch's "The Narcissistic Personality of Our Time" and Literary Examples
 - Explanations in Jessica Benjamin's "The Oedipal Riddle" and Literary Examples
 - Conclusion
 - Works Cited
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Overall Intro. to Narcissism

- ❏ Who is Narcissus? What are some of the characters he has displayed to those around him?
- ❏ What does it mean to be narcissistic?
- ❏ Do you know any explanations or examples to people who show narcissistic symptoms?



Christopher Lasch's "The Narcissistic Personality of Our Time"

- Intro. to the Dialogue of Self-love
- Narcissism in Literature
- Social influences on Narcissism

Intro. to the Dialogue of Self-love

- What “Narcissism” means
 - The Origin from Greek Mythology

The spring where Narcissus saw himself is said to be in the territory of the Thespians in a place called Donacon. Some reject the story that tells that Narcissus, looking into the water, did not understand that he saw his own reflection, and fell in love with himself, dying of love at the spring. For it is stupid to imagine, they argue, that a man old enough to fall in love was unable to distinguish a man from a man's reflection. ([Source](#))

Intro. to the Dialogue of Self-love

■ Contemporary Use of Term

1. A social and cultural phenomenon grown out of clinical writing on the subject. (Lasch 222)
2. It is recognized as an important element in the so-called character disorders that have absorbed much of the clinical attention once given to hysteria and obsessional neurosis. (Lasch 223)
3. In one of the essays of Freud on the subject of narcissism, it is a treatment of the libidinal investment of the self, as a necessary precondition of object love. Furthermore, it is the incorporation of grandiose object images as a defense against anxiety and guilt.

Intro. to the Dialogue of Self-love

- Secondary Narcissism
 - Is an attempt to annul the pain of disappointed object love and to nullify the child's rage against those who do not respond to his needs. (Lasch 223)
- The Use of Pathological Narcissism
 - It could not be considered simply a fixation at the level of normal primitive narcissism.
 - Question: Is there any other examples you could think of?



Narcissism in Literature

□ Psychoanalysis in Clinical Literature

- A therapy grew out of experience with severely repressed and morally rigid individuals who needed to come to terms a rigorous inner “censor” (Lasch 224).
 - Studies show that personality disorders which occupy the borderline between neurosis and psychosis, that the sufferers are unappeasably hungry for emotional experiences to fill an inner void, and terrified of aging and death (Lasch 224).
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Narcissism in Literature

- **Theoretical Base: Melanie Klein's studies on children**
 - Internalized images of others, buried in the unconscious mind at an early age, become self-images as well (Lasch 225).
 - **Kernberg's Argument**
 - In the face of the many difficulties presented by narcissistic patients, is the devastating effect of narcissism on the second half of their lives (Lasch 226).
 - Defenses against the ravage of age-identification with ethical or artistic values beyond one's immediate interests, intellectual curiosity and happy relationships in the past (Lasch 226-27).
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Narcissism in Literature

- Literary examples from the text
 - Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher"
 - Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"
 - Defoe's Robinson Crusoe

 - Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher"
 - The MS. gave evidence of nervous agitation. The writer spoke of acute bodily illness—of a pitiable mental idiosyncrasy which oppressed him—and of an earnest desire to see me, as his best, and indeed, his only personal friend, with a view of attempting, by the cheerfulness of my society, some alleviation of his malady. It was the manner in which all this, and much more, was said—it was the apparent heart that went with his request—which allowed me no room for hesitation [. . .] forthwith (Poe 1535).
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Narcissism in Literature

- Upon my entrance, Usher rose from a sofa upon which he had been lying at full length, and greeted me with a vivacious warmth which had much in it. I at first thought of an overdone cordiality—of the constrained effort of the ennuye man of the world. A glance, however, at his countenance convinced me of his perfect sincerity. [. . .] The now ghastly pallor of the skin, and the now miraculous lustre of the eye, above all things startled and even awed me. The silken hair, too, had been suffered to grow all unheeded, and as, in its wild gossamer texture, it floated rather than fell about the face (Poe 1537).
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Narcissism in Literature

- He was enchained by certain superstitions impressions in regard to the dwelling which he tenanted, and from which, for many years, he had never ventured forth—in regard to an influence whose superstitious force was conveyed in terms too shadowy and substance of his family mansion, had, by dint of long sufferance, he said, obtained over his spirit—an effect which the physique of the gray walls and turrets, and of the dim tarn into which they all looked down, had, at length, brought about upon the morale of his existence (Poe 1538).
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Narcissism in Literature

□ Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"

- He said we came here solely on my account, that I was to have perfect rest and all the air I could get. [. . .] So we took the nursery at the top of the house. [. . .] The paint and paper look as if a boys' school had used it. It is stripped off—the paper—in great patches all around the head of my bed, about as far as I can reach, and in a great place on the other side of the room low down. I never saw a worse paper in my life (Gilman 834).
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Narcissism in Literature

- In this damp weather it is awful, I wake up in the night and find it hanging to reach the smell. But now I am used to it. The only thing I can think of that it is like the color of the paper! A yellow smell. [. . .] I wonder how it was done, and who did it, and what they did it for. Round and round and round—round and round and round—it makes me dizzy! (Gilman 841).

□ Defoe's Robinson Crusoe

- My island is now peopled, and I thought myself very rich in subjects; and it was a merry reflection which I frequently made, how like a king I looked. First of all, the whole country was my own property; so that I had an undoubted right of dominion. Secondly, my people were perfectly subjected: I was absolute lord and lawgiver; they all owed their lives to me, and were ready to lay down their lives, if there had been occasion of it, for me (Defoe 215).
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Narcissism in Literature

- Narcissism in the Three Texts
 1. All of the main characters in the three texts are shut up either willingly or unwillingly
 2. The notion of ego-centric has developed strongly upon the three main characters of each of the stories, as they each focus more and more on themselves in the story in the end.
 3. All three reveal the sense of self and the identity behind the self to the audience within the dialogues and the atmosphere portrayed.
 4. The indulgence of the self within the three texts complicates the situation in the ending part of each—some find their way out, while others are stuck within their own whirlpools of identity.
 5. Last but not least, when the love of the self turns into extremes, the degree of sufferance and self-redemption lies according to its methodologies.
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Social Influences on Narcissism

- **What narcissists are faced within the society**
 - In Freud's time
 - Hysteria and obsessional neurosis carried to extremes the personality traits associated with the capitalist order at an earlier stage in its development (Lasch 227).
 - An inclusion of acquisitiveness, fanatical devotion to work, and a fierce repression of sexuality involved (Lasch 227).
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Social Influences on Narcissism

- In Our (Heinz Lichtenstein's) Time
 - The preschizophrenic, borderline or personality disorders have attracted increasing attention, along with schizophrenia itself (Lasch 227).
 - Lichtenstein pointed out the change in neurotic patterns already constituted a well-known fact [. . .] (Lasch 227).
 - Narcissists and the Contemporary Society
 - Narcissistic patients suffer from 'pervasive feelings of emptiness and a deep disturbance of self-esteem.
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Social Influences on Narcissism

- The reported increase in the number of these patients does not necessarily indicate that these orders are more common than they are used to be, but as a whole have become more common (Lasch 228).
- **Question:** Do we in some cases experience such a feeling or condition at times? Are there any examples to share about?



Jessica Benjamin's "The Oedipal Riddle"

● Introduction

● Masculine and Feminine Identity

● Literary Examples

● The New Oedipus

Introduction

- **The Split Between Masculine and Feminine Identity**
- **The Oedipal Model of Freud**
 - The idea of the father as the protector, or even savior
 - A mother who would pull us back to the “limitless narcissism” of infancy (Benjamin 232)
 - Question: Is there any related experience you could think of?



Masculine and Feminine Identity

- **The issue of Narcissus and Oedipus**
 - Lasch's viewpoint on the notion of narcissism reflects the decline of modern man
 - Narcissus has replaced Oedipus as the myth of our time. Narcissism is now seen to be at the root of everything from the ill-fated romance with violent revolution to the enthralled mass consumption of state-of-the-art products and the "lifestyles of the rich and famous" (Benjamin 233).
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Masculine and Feminine Identity

- Oedipus represented responsibility and guilt, Narcissus represented self-involvement and denial of reality (Benjamin 233).
 - Criticism and provocation from Benjamin
 - A demonstration of the father-less society (Benjamin 234)
 - The problem of the paternal (Benjamin 235)
 - As a reading of psychoanalytic discourse, this viewpoint is equally limited. We should start by noting that psychoanalysis do not commonly express the sort of crass nostalgia for authority than we find in the critique of the New Narcissist, even if they are in sympathy with it (Benjamin 234).
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Oedipus Complex and Femininity

- Narcissism does not mean self-love or lack of erotic connection to the other, but a love of someone like oneself, a homoerotic love (Benjamin 236).
- For Freud, the Oedipus Complex surrounds around two stages of the infancy of returning to the mother and the later stage of the repudiation of femininity (Benjamin 236).
- **Question:** Is there any contradictions to the model? (Benjamin 237-39)



Literary Examples

- Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven"
 - Edgar Allan Poe's "To---. Ulalume: A Ballad"
 - Question:
 - Both of the poems on the surface provide implications of Poe's love towards women, but is it really about for the sake of just the love of women, especially those women who are already dead? (Kopley 193 and 198)
 - What narcissistic elements in terms of the "Oedipal Riddle" could also be found in these two poems?
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Literary Examples

□ Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven"

- Ah, distinctly I remember, it was in the bleak December,
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.
Eagerly I wished the morrow; vainly I had sought to borrow
From my books surcease of sorrow, sorrow for the lost Lenore,
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore,
Nameless here forevermore (Poe 1519).
 - Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an
unseen censer
Swung by seraphim whose footfalls tinkled on the tufted floor.
"Wretch," I cried, "thy God hath lent thee -- by these angels he
hath
Sent thee respite---respite and nepenthe from thy memories of
Lenore!
Quaff, O quaff this kind nepenthe, and forget this lost Lenore!"
Quoth the raven, "Nevermore!"
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Literary Examples

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil!--prophet still, if bird or devil!
Whether tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here
ashore,
Desolate, yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted--
On this home by horror haunted--tell me truly, I implore:
Is there--is there balm in Gilead?--tell me--tell me I implore!"
Quoth the raven, "Nevermore" (Poe 1520).

- Tell this soul with sorrow laden, if, within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden, whom the angels name Lenore---
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden, whom the angels name Lenore?
Quoth the raven, "Nevermore."
"Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!" I shrieked,
upstarting--
"Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!
Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!
Leave my loneliness unbroken! -- quit the bust above my door!
(Poe 1521).
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Literary Examples

□ Edgar Allan Poe's "To---. Ulalume: A Ballad"

- Here once, through an alley Titanic, Of cypress, I roamed with my Soul-- Of cypress, with Psyche, my Soul. These were days when my heart was volcanic As the scoriac rivers that roll-- As the lavas that restlessly roll Their sulphurous currents down Yaanek, In the ultimate climes of the Pole-- That groan as they roll down Mount Yaanek, In the realms of the Boreal Pole. Our talk had been serious and sober, But our thoughts they were palsied and sere-- Our memories were treacherous and sere; For we knew not the month was October, And we marked not the night of the year-- (Ah, night of all nights in the year!) We noted not the dim lake of Auber, (Though once we had journeyed down here) We remembered not the dank tarn of Auber, Nor the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir (Poe 1521-22)
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Literary Examples

- Its Sybillic splendor is beaming With Hope and in Beauty to-night-- See!--it flickers up the sky through the night! Ah, we safely may trust to its gleaming And be sure it will lead us aright-- We surely may trust to a gleaming That cannot but guide us aright Since it flickers up to Heaven through the night." Thus I pacified Psyche and kissed her, And tempted her out of her gloom-- And conquered her scruples and gloom; And we passed to the end of the vista-- But were stopped by the door of a tomb-- By the door of a legended tomb:-- And I said-- "What is written, sweet sister, On the door of this legended tomb?" She replied--"Ulalume--Ulalume!-- 'Tis the vault of thy lost Ulalume!" (Poe 1523).
- From the secret that lies in these wolds-- From the thing that lies hidden in these wolds-- Have drawn up the spectre of a planet From the limbo of lunary souls-- (Poe 1523).



The New Oedipus

- The dualism withhold—the upshot of rejection in terms of sexual polarity, subject and object
 - Once the unbridgeable sexual difference is established, its dissolution is threatening to male identity, to the precious identification with the father. Especially by holding on to the ideal phallus, is now the means of protection against being overwhelmed by the mother (Benjamin 237).
 - The problem
 - The problem with the oedipal model should come as no surprise when we consider that men have generally not recognized women as equal independent subjects, but rather perceived them as sexual objects (Benjamin 238).
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The New Oedipus

□ Solution

- The way out of the oedipal repudiation of femininity must be sought in the period that comes before it. Between the boy's early disidentification with the mother and his oedipal separation from her is a neglected phase of playful, secondary identification with femininity. (Benjamin 240).
 - By changing social relations of gender gives a glimpse of another world, a space that each of us can play the other and accept difference by making it familiar (Benjamin 240).
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The New Oedipus

- Going Beyond Oedipus
 - To go beyond Oedipus, the role of understanding gender differences becomes a major issue.
 - When individuals lose access to internal and external forms of maternal identification, independence backfires: it stimulates a new kind of helplessness, one which has to be countered by a still greater idealization of control and self-sufficiency (Benjamin 243).
 - The vision of perfect oneness is a symbolic expression of our longing, that we project onto the past (Benjamin 243)
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The New Oedipus

- The paternal authority still resonates today, but the father's authority will persist as we accept the ideal of rationality as the antithesis of "limitless narcissism" (Benjamin 244).
- Question: Are there any relevant examples you could think of?



Conclusion

- It is evident that the Oedipal theory denies the necessity of mutual recognition between man and woman. Hence, by rejecting this false premise of paternal authority as the only road to freedom, it has to be construed that the oedipal theory has come to terms with difference.
- Question: How has the two articles coincided with each other? Or, are against of each other? Any examples?



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