

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*
"The Story of Narcissus" (excerpts)

Now Narcissus,
Was sixteen years of age, and could be taken
Either for boy or man; and boys and girls
Both sought his love, but in that slender stripling
Was pride so fierce no boy, no girl, could touch him.
...
Finally one rejected lover, in prayer,
Raised up his hands to Heaven: "May Narcissus
Love one day, so, himself, and not win over
The creature whom he loves!" Nemesis heard him,
Goddess of vengeance, and judged the plea was
righteous.
There was a pool, silver with water. Here Narcissus,
Worn from the heat of hunting, came to rest
Finding the place delightful, and the spring
Refreshing for the thirsty. As he tried
To quench his thirst, inside him, deep within him,
Another thirst was growing, for he saw
An image in the pool, and fell in love
With that unbodied hope, and found a substance
In what was only shadow. He looks in wonder,
Charmed by himself, spell-bound, and no more moving
Than any marble statue. Everything attracts him
That makes him so attractive. Foolish boy,
He wants himself; the loved becomes the lover,
The seeker sought, and kindler burns. How often
He tries to kiss the image in the water,
Not knowing what he sees, but burning for it.
...
Why try and catch an always fleeing image,
Poor credulous youngster? What you seek is nowhere,
And if you turn away, you will take with you
The boy you love.
...

He rises, just a little, crying to the forest:
"What love, whose love, has ever been more cruel?
Through the long centuries has anyone
Pined away as I do? He is charming,
I see him, but the charm and sight escape me.
I love him and I cannot seem to find him!"
...
I know
The truth at last. He is myself! I feel it,
I know my image now. I burn with love
Of my own self; I start the fire I suffer.
What should I do? Shall I give or take the asking?
What shall I ask for? What I want is with me,
My riches make me poor. If I could only
Escape from my own body! If I could only-
How curious a prayer from any lover-
Be parted from my love!
...
He turned again to the image in the water,
Seeing it blue through tears, and the vision fading,
And as he saw it vanish, he called after:
"Where are you going? Stay: do not desert me,
I love you so. I cannot touch you; let me
Keep looking at you always, and in looking
Nourish my wretched passion!"
...
Ah, Boy, beloved in vain! so Echo said.
Farewell. Farewell, sighed she. Then down he lies:
Death's cold hand shuts his self-admiring eyes:
Which now eternally their gazes fix
Upon the waters of infernal Styx.